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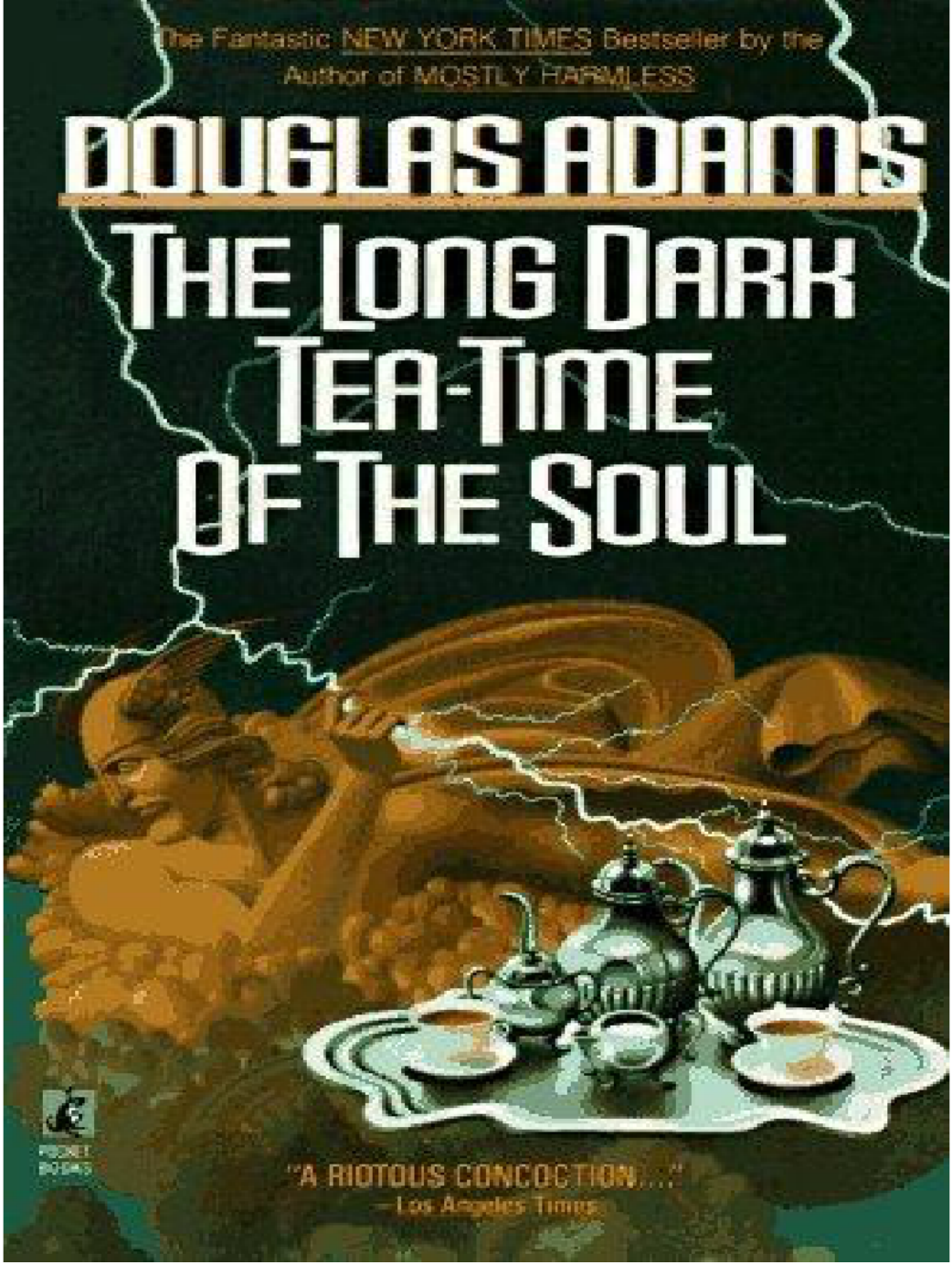
DOUGLAS ADAMS

THE LONG DARK TEA-TIME OF THE SOUL



POCKET BOOKS

"A RIOTOUS CONCOCTION..."
— Los Angeles Times

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

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By Adams, Douglas

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Chapter 1

It can hardly be a coincidence that no language on Earth hasever produced the expression “as pretty as an airport”.

Airports are ugly. Some are very ugly. Some attain a degreeof ugliness that can only be the result of a special effort. Thisugliness arises because airports ane full of people who are tired,cross, and have just discovered that their luggage has landed inMurmansk (Murmansk airport is the only known exception tothis otherwise infallible rule), and architects have on the wholetried to reflect this in their designs.

They have sought to highlight the tiredness and crossnessmotif with brutal shapes and nerve jangling colours, to makeeffortless the business of separating the traveller for ever fromhis or her luggage or loved ones, to confuse the traveller witharrows that appear to point at the windows, distant tie racks, orthe current position of Ursa Minor in the night sky, andwherever possible to expose the plumbing on the grounds that itis functional, and conceal the location of the departure gates,presumably on the grounds that they are not.

Caught in the middle of a sea of hazy light and a sea of hazynoise, Kate Schechter stood and doubted.

All the way out of London to Heathrow she had suffered fromdoubt. She was not a superstitious person, or even a religiousperson. she was simply someone who was not at all sure sheshould be flying to Norway. But she was finding it increasinglyeasy to believe that God, if there was a God, and if it wasremotely possible that any godlike being who could order thedisposition of particles at the creation of the Universe wouldalso be interested in directing traffic on the M4, did not want herto fly to Norway either. All the trouble with the tickets, finding anext-door neighbour to look after the cat, then finding the cat soit could be looked after by the next-door neighbour, the suddenleak in the roof, the missing wallet, the weather, the unexpecteddeath of the next-door neighbour, the pregnancy of the cat - itall had the semblance of an orchestrated campaign ofobstruction which had begun to assume godlike proportions.

Even the taxi-driver - when she had eventually found a taxi- had said, “Norway? What you want to go there for?” And whenshe hadn’t instantly said, “‘The aurora borealis!” or “Fjords!” buthad looked doubtful for a moment and bitten her lip, he had said,”I know, I bet it’s some bloke dragging you out there. Tell youwhat, tell him to stuff it. Go to Tenerife.”

There was an idea.

Tenerife.

Or even, she dared to think for a fleeting second, home.

She had stared dumbly out of the taxi window at the angrytangles of traffic and thought that however cold and miserablethe weather was here, that was nothing to what it would be likein Norway.

Or, indeed, at home. Home would bc about as icebound asNorway right now. Icebound, and punctuated with geysers ofsteam bursting out of the grnund, catching in the frigid air anddissipating bctween the glacial cliff faces of Sixth Avenue.

A quick glance at the itinerary Kate had pursued in the courseof her thirty years would reveal her without any doubt to be aNew Yorker. For though she had lived in the city very little,most of her life had been spent at a constant distance from it.Los Angeles, San Francisco, Europe, and a period of distractedwandering around South America five years ago following theloss of her newly mamed husband, Luke, in a New York taxi-hailing accident.

She enjoyed the notion that New York was home, and thatshe missed it, but in fact the only thing she really missed waspizza. And not just any old pizza, but the sort of pizza theybrought to your door if you phoned them up and asked them to.That was the only real pizza. Pizza that you had to go out and sitat a table staring at red paper napkins for wasn't real pizzahowever much extra pepperoni and anchovy they put on it.

London was the place she liked living in most, apart, ofcourse, from the pizza problem, which drove her crazy. Whywould no one deliver pizza? Why did no one understand that itwas fundamental to the whole nature of pizza that it amved atyour front door in a hot cardboard box? That you slithered it outof greaseproof paper and ate it in folded slices in front of theTV? What was the fundamental flaw in the stupid, stuck-up,sluggardly English that they couldn't grasp this simpleprinciple? For some odd reason it was the one frustration shecould never learn simply to live with and accept, and about oncea month or so she would get very depressed, phone a pizzarestaurant, order the biggest, most lavish pizza she coulddescribe - pizza with an extra pizza on it, essentially - and then,sweetly, ask them to deliver it.

"To what?"

"Deliver. Let me give you the address - "

"I don't understand. Aren't you going to come and pick itup?"

"No. Aren't you going to deliver? My address - "

"Er, we don't do that, miss."

“Don’t do what?”

“Er, deliver. . .”

“You don’t deliver? Am I hearing you correctly… ?”

The exchange would quickly degenerate into an ugly slangingmatch which would leave her feeling drained and shaky, butmuch, much better the following morning. In all other respectsshe was one of the most sweet-natured people you could hope tomeet.

But today was testing her to the limit.

There had been terrible traffic jams on the motorway, andwhen the distant flash of blue lights made it clear that the causewas an accident somewhere ahead of them Kate had becomemore tense and had stared fixedly out of the other window aseventually they had crawled past it.

The taxi-driver had been bad-tempered when at last he haddropped her off because she didn’t have the right money, andthere was a lot of disgruntled hunting through tight trouserpockets before he was eventually able to find change for her.The atmosphere was heavy and thundery and now, standing inthe middle of the main check-in concourse at Terminal Two,Heathrow Airport, she could not find the check-in desk for herflight to Oslo.

She stood very still for a moment, breathing calmly anddeeply and trying not to think of Jean-Philippe.

Jean-Philippe was, as the taxi-driver had correctly guessed,the reason why she was going to Norway, but was also thereason why she was convinced that Norway was not at all agood place for her to go. Thinking of him therefore made herhead oscillate and it seemed best not to think about him at all butsimply to go to Norway as if that was where she happened to begoing anyway. She would then be terribly surprised to bumpinto him at whatever hotel it was he had written on the card thatwas tucked into the side pocket of her handbag.

In fact she would be surprised to find him there anyway.What she would be much more likely to find was a messagefrom him saying that he had been unexpectedly called away toGuatemala, Seoul or Tenerife and that he would call her fromthere. Jean-Philippe was the most continually absent person shehad ever met. In this he was the culmination of a series. Sinceshe had lost Luke to the great yellow Chevrolet she had beenoddly dependent on the rather vacant emotions that a successionof self-absorbed men had inspired in her.

She tried to shut all this out of her mind, and even shut hereyes for a second. She wished that when she opened them

againthere would be a sign in front of her saying “This way forNorway” which she could simply follow without needing tothink about it or anything else ever again. This, she reflected, ina continuation of her earlier train of thought, was presumablyhow religions got started, and must be the reason why so manysects hang around airports looking for converts. They know thatpeople there are at their most vulnerable and perplexed, andready to accept any kind of guidance.

Kate opened her eyes again and was, of course, disappointed.But then a second or two later there was a momentary parting ina long surging wave of cross Germans in inexplicable yellowpolo shirts and through it she had a brief glimpse of the check-indesk for Oslo. Lugging her garment bag on to her shoulder, shemade her way towards it.

There was just one other person before her in the line at thedesk and he, it turned out, was having trouble or perhaps makingit.

He was a large man, impressively large and well-built - evenexpertly built - but he was also definitely odd-looking in a waythat Kate couldn’t quite deal with. She couldn’t even say what itwas that was odd about him, only that she was immediatelyinclined not to include him on her list of things to think about atthe moment. She remembered reading an article which hadexplained that the central processing unit of the human brainonly had seven memory registers, which meant that if you hadseven things in your mind at the same time and then thought ofsomething else, orte of the other seven would instantly drop out.

In quick succession she thought about whether or not she waslikely to catch the plane, about whether it was just herimagination that the day was a particularly bloody one, aboutairline staff who smile charmingly and are breathtakingly rude,about Duty Free shops which are able to charge much lowerprices than ordinary shops but - mysteriously - don’t, aboutwhether or not she felt a magazine article about airports comingon which might help pay for the trip, about whether her garmentbag would hurt less on her other shoulder and finally, in spite ofall her intentions to the contrary, about Jean-Philippe, who wasanother set of at lest seven subtopics all to himself.

The man standing arguing in front of her popped right out ofher mind.

It was only the announcement on the airport Tannoy of thelast call for her flight to Oslo which forced her attention back tothe situation in front of her.

The large man was making trouble about the fact that hehadn't been given a first class seat reservation. It had justtranspired that the reason for this was that he didn't in fact havea first class ticket.

Kate's spirits sank to the very bottom of her being and beganto prowl around there making a low growling noise.

It now transpired that the man in front of her didn't actuallyhave a ticket at all, and the argument then began to range freelyand angrily over such topics as the physical appearance of theairline :heck-in girl, her qualities as a person, theories about herancestors, speculations as to what surprises the future mighthave in store for her and the airline for which she worked, andfinally lit by chance on the happy subject of the man's creditcard.

He didn't have one.

Further discussions ensued, and had to do with cheques, andwhy the airline did not accept them.

Kate took a long, slow, murderous look at her watch.

"Excuse me," she said, interrupting the transactions. "Is thisgoing to take long? I have to catch the Oslo flight."

"I'm just dealing with this gentleman," said the girl, "I'll bewith you in just one second."

Kate nodded, and politely allowed just one second to go by.

"It's just that the flight's about to leave," she said then. "Ihave one bag, I have my ticket, I have a reservation. It'll takeabout thirty seconds. I hate to interrupt, but I'd hate even moreto miss my flight for the sake of thirty seconds. That's thirtyactual seconds, not thirty `just one' seconds, which could keepus here all night."

The check-in girl turned the full glare on her lipgloss on toKate, but before she could speak the large blond man lookedround, and the effect of his face was a little disconcerting.

"I, too," he said in a slow, angry Nordic voice, "wish to fly toOslo."

Kate stared at him. He looked thoroughly out of place in anairport, or rather, the airport looked thoroughly out of placearound him.

"Well," she said, "the way we're stacked up at the moment itlooks like neither of us is going to make it. Can we just sort thisone out? What's the hold-up?"

The check-in girl smiled her charming, dead smile and said,"The airline does not accept cheques, as a matter of companypolicy."

"Well I do," said Kate, slapping down her own credit

card."Charge the gentleman's ticket to this, and I'll take a chequefrom him.

"OK?" she added to the big man, who was looking at her withslow surprise. His eyes were large and blue and conveyed theimpression that they had looked at a lot of glaciers in their time.They were extraordinarily arrogant and also muddled.

"OK?" she repeated briskly. "My name is Kate Schechter.Two `c's, two `h's, two `e's and also a `t', an `r' and an `s'.Provided they're all there the bank won't be fussy about theorder they come in. They never seem to know themselves."

The man very slowly inclined his head a little towards her ina rough bow of acknowledgement. He thanked her for herkindness, courtesy and some Norwegian word that was lost onher, said that it was a long while since he had encounteredanything of the kind, that she was a woman of spirit and someother Norwegian word, and that he was indebted to her. He alsoadded, as an afterthought, that he had no cheque-book.

"Right!" said Kate, determined not to be deflected from hercourse. She fished in her handbag for a piece of paper, took apen from the check-in counter, scribbled on the paper and thrustit at him.

"That's my address," she said, "send me the money. Hockyour fur coat if you have to. Just send it me. OK? I'm taking aflyer on trusting you."

The big man took the scrap of paper, read the few words on itwith immense slowness, then folded it with elaborate care andput it into the pocket of his coat. Again he bowed to her veryslightly.

Kate suddenly realised that the check-in girl was silentlywaiting for her pen back to fill in the credit card form. Shepushed it back at her in annoyance, handed over her own ticketand imposed on herself an icy calm.

The airport Tannoy announced the departure of their flight.

"May I see your passports, please?" said the girl unhunriedly.

Kate handed hers over, but the big man didn't have one.

"You what?" exclaimed Kate. The airline girl simply stoppedmoving at all and stared quietly at a random point on her deskwaiting for someone else to make a move. It wasn't herproblem.

The man repeated angrily that he didn't have a passport. Heshouted it and banged his fist on the counter so hard that it wasslightly dented by the force of the blow.

Kate picked up her ticket, her passport and her credit card andhoisted her garment bag back up on to her shoulder.

“This is when I get off,” she said, and simply walked away.She felt that she had made every effort a human being couldpossibly be expected to make to catch her plane, but that it wasnot to be. She would send a message to Jean-Philippe saying thatshe could not be there, and it would probably sit in a slot next tohis message to her saying why he could not be there either. Foronce they would be equally absent.

For the time being she would go and cool off. She set off insearch of first a newspaper and then some coffee, and by dint offollowing the appropriate signs was unable to locate either. Shewas then unable to find a working phone from which to send amessage, and decided to give up on the airport altogether. Justget out, she told herself, find a taxi, and go back home.

She threaded her way back across the check-in concourse,and had almost made it to the exit when she happened to glanceback at the check-in desk that had defeated her, and was just intime to see it shoot up through the roof engulfed in a ball oforange flame.

As she lay beneath a pile of rubble, in pain, darkness, andchoking dust, trying to find sensation in her limbs, she was atleast relieved to be able to think that she hadn’t merely beenimagining that this was a bad day. So thinking, she passed out.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 2

The usual people tried to claim responsibility.

First the IRA, then the PLO and the Gas Board. Even BritishNuclear Fuels rushed out a statement to the effect that thesituation was completely under control, that it was a one in amillion chance, that there was hardly any radioactive leakage atall, and that the site of the explosion would make a nice locationfor a day out with the kids and a picnic, before finally having toadmit that it wasn't actually anything to do with them at all.

No cause could be found for the explosion.

It seemed to have happened spontaneously and of its own freewill. Explanations were advanced, but most of these weresimply phrases which restated the problem in different words,along the same principles which had given the world "metalfatigue". In fact, a very similar phrase was invented to accountfor the sudden transition of wood, metal, plastic and concreteinto an explosive condition, which was "non-linear catastrophicsWctural exasperation", or to put it another way - as a juniorcabinet minister did on television the following night in a phrasewhich was to haunt the rest of his career - the check-in desk hadjust got "fundamentally fed up with being where it was".

As in all such disastrous events, estimates of the casualtiesvaried wildly. They started at forty-seven dead, eighty-nineseriously injured, went up to sixty-three dead, a hundred andthirty injured, and rose as high as one hundred and seventeendead before the figures started to be revised downwards oncemore. The final figures revealed that once all the people whocould be accounted for had been accounted for, in fact no onehad been killed at all. A small number of people were in hospitalsuffering from cuts and bruises and varying degrees oftraumatised shock, but that, unless anyone had any informationabout anybody actually being missing, was that.

This was yet another inexplicable aspect to the whole affair.The force of the explosion had been enough to reduce a largepart of the front of Terminal Two to rubble, and yet everyoneinside the building had somehow either fallen very luckily, orbeen shielded from one piece of falling masonry by another, orhad the shock of the explosion absorbed by their luggage. All inall, very little luggage had survived at all. There were questionsasked in Parliament about this, but not very interesting ones.

It was a couple of days before Kate Schechter became awareof any of these things, or indeed of anything at all in the outsideworld.

She passed the time quietly in a world of her own in whichshe was surrounded as far as the eye could see with old cabintrunks full of past memories in which she rummaged with greatcuriosity, and sometimes bewilderment. Or, at least, about atenth of the cabin trunks were full of vivid, and often painful oruncomfortable memories of her past life; the other nine-tenthswere full of penguins, which surprised her. Insofar as sherecognised at all that she was dreaming, she realised that shemust be exploring her own subconscious mind. She had heard itsaid that humans are supposed only to use about a tenth of theirbrains, and that no one was very clear what the other nine-tenthswere for, but she had certainly never heard it suggested that theywere used for storing penguins.

Gradually the trunks, the memories and the penguins began togrow indistinct, to become all white and swimmy, then tobecome like walls that were all white and swimmy, and finallyto become walls that were merely white, or rather a yellowish,greenish kind of off-white, and to enclose her in a small room.

The room was in semi-darkness. A bedside light was on butturned down low, and the light from a street lamp found its waybetween the grey curtains and threw sodium patterns on theopposite wall. She became dimly aware of the shadowed shapeof her own body lying under the white, turned-down sheet andthe pale, neat blankets. She stared at it for a nervous while,checking that it looked right before she tried, tentatively, tomove any part of it. She tried her right hand, and that seemed tobe fine. A little stiff and aching, but the fingers all responded,and all seemed to be of the right length and thickness, and tobend in the right places and in the right directions.

She panicked briefly when she couldn’t immediately locateher left hand, but then she found it lying across her stomach andnagging at her in some odd way. It took her a second or two ofconcentration to put together a number of rather disturbingfeelings and realise that there was a needle bandaged into herarm. This shook her quite badly. From the needle there snaked along thin transparent pipe that glistened yellowly in the lightfrom the street lamp and hung in a gentle curl from a thickplastic bag suspended from a tall metal stand. An array ofhorrors briefly assailed her in respect of this apparatus, but shepeered dimly at the bag and saw the words “Dextro-Saline”.

Shemade herself calm down again and lay quietly for a fewmoments before continuing her exploration.

Her ribcage seemed undamaged. Bruised and tender, butthere was no shaiper pain anywhere to suggest that anything wasbroken. Her hips and thighs ached and were stiff, but revealedno serious hurt. She flexed the muscles down her right leg andthen her left. She rather fancied that her left ankle was sprained.

In other words, she told herself, she was perfectly all right. Sowhat was she doing here in what she could tell from the septiccolour of the paint was clearly a hospital?

She sat up impatiently, and immediately rejoined the penguins for an entertaining few minutes.

The next time she came round she treated herself with a littlemore care, and lay quietly, feeling gently nauseous.

She poked gingerly at her memory of what had happened. Itwas dark and blotchy and came at her in sick, greasy waves likethe North Sea. Lumpy things jumbled themselves out of it andslowly arranged themselves into a heaving airport. The airportwas sour and ached in her head, and in the middle of it, pulsinglike a migraine, was the memory of a moment's whirling splurgeof light.

It became suddenly very clear to her that the check-inconcourse of Terminal Two at Heathrow Airport had been hit bya meteorite. Silhouetted in the flare was the fur-coated figure ofa big man who must have caught the full force of it and beenreduced instantly to a cloud of atoms that were free to go as theypleased. The thought caused a deep and horrid shudder to gothrough her. He had been infuriating and arrogant, but she hadliked him in an odd way. There had been something oddly noblein his perverse bloody-mindedness. Or maybe, she realised, sheliked to think that such perverse bloody-mindedness was noblebecause it reminded her of herself trying to order pizza to bedelivered in an alien, hostile and non-pizza-delivering world.Nobleness was one word for making a fuss about the trivialinevitabilities of life, but there were others.

She felt a sudden surge of fear and loneliness, but it quicklyebbed away and left her feeling much more composed, relaxed,and wanting to go to the lavatory.

According to her watch it was shortly after three o'clock, andaccording to everything else it was night-time. She shouldprobably call a nurse and let the world know she had comeround. There was a window in the side wall of the room throughwhich she could see a dim corridor in which stood a

stretchertrolley and a tall black oxygen bottle, but which was otherwiseempty. Things were very quiet out there.

Peering around her in the small room she saw a white-paintedplywood cupboard, a couple of tubular steel and vinyl chairslurking quietly in the shadows, and a white-painted plywoodbedside cabinet which supported a small bowl with a singlebanana in it. On the other side of the bed stood her drip stand.Set into the wall on that side of the bed was a metal plate with acouple of black knobs and a set of old bakelite headphoneshanging from it, and wound around the tubular side pillar of thebedhead was a cable with a bell push attached to it, which shefingered, and then decided not to push.

She was fine. She could find her own way about.

Slowly, a little woozily, she pushed herself up on to herelbows, and slid her legs out from under the sheets and on to thefloor, which was cold to her feet. She could tell almostimmediately that she shouldn't be doing this because every partof her feet was sending back streams of messages telling herexactly what every tiniest bit of the floor that they touched feltlike, as if it was a strange and worrying thing the like of whichthey had never encountered before. Nevertheless she sat on theedge of the bed and made her feet accept the floor as somethingthey were just going to have to get used to.

Ttte hospital had put her into a large, baggy, striped thing. Itwasn't merely baggy, she decided on examining it more closely,it actually was a bag. A bag of loose blue and white stripedcotton. It opened up the back and let in chilly night draughts.Perfunctory sleeves flopped half-way down her arms. Shemoved her arms around in the light, examining the skin, rubbingit and pinching it, especially around the bandage which held herdrip needle in place. Normally her arms were lithe and the skinwas firm and supple. Tonight, however, they looked like bits ofchickens. Briefly she smoothed each forearm with her otherhand, and then looked up again, purposefully.

She reached out and gripped the drip stand and, because itwobbled slightly less than she did, she was able to use it to pullherself slowly to her feet. She stood there, her tall slim figuretrembling, and after a few seconds she held the drip stand awayat a bent arm's length, like a shepherd holding a crook.

She had not made it to Norway, but she was at least standingup.

The drip stand rolled on four small and independentlyperverse wheels which behaved like four screaming children in asupermarket, but nevertheless Kate was able to propel it to

thedoor ahead of her. Walking increased her sense of wooziness,but also increased her resolve not to give in to it. She reachedthe door, opened it, and pushing the drip stand out ahead of her,looked out into the corridor.

To her left the corridor ended in a couple of swing-doors withcircular porthole windows, which seemed to lead into a largerarea, an open ward perhaps. To her right a number of smallerdoors opened off the corridor as it continued on for a shortdistance before turning a sharp corner. One of those doors wouldprobably be the lavatory. The others? Well, she would find outas she looked for the lavatory.

The first two were cupboards. The third was slightly biggerand had a chair in it and therefor probably counted as a roomsince most people don't like to sit in cupboards, even nurses,who have to do a lot of things that most people wouldn't like to.It also had a stack of styro beakers, a lot of semi-congealedcoffee creamer and an elderly coffee maker, all sitting on top ofa small table together and seeping grimly over a copy of theEvening Standard.

Kate picked up the dark, damp paper and tried to reconstructsome of her missing days from it. However, what with her ownwobbly condition making it difficult to read, and the droopilystuck-together condition of the newspaper, she was able to gleanlittle more than the fact that no one could really say for certainwhat had happened. It seemed that no one had been seriouslyhurt, but that an employee of one of the airlines was stillunaccounted for. The incident had now been officially classifiedas an "Act of God".

"Nice one, God," thought Kate. She put down the remains ofthe paper and closed the door behind her.

The next door she tried was another small side ward like herown. There was a bedside table and a single banana in the fruitbowl.

The bed was clearly occupied. She pulled the door to quickly,but she did not pull it quickly enough. Unfortunately somethingodd had caught her attention, but although she had noticed it,she coutd not immediately say what it was. She stood there withthe door half closed, staring at the door, knowing that she shouldnot look again, and knowing that she would.

Carefully she eased the door back open again.

The room was darkly shadowed and chilly. The chilliness didnot give her a good feeling about the occupant of the bed. Shelistened. The silence didn't sound too good either. It wasn't thesilence of healthy deep sleep, it was the silence of nothing but alittle distant traffic noise.

She hesitated for a long while, silhouetted in the doorway,looking and listening. She wondered about the sheer bulk of theoccupant of the bed and how cold he was with just a thin blanketpulled over him. Next to the bed was a small tubular-leggedvinyl bucket chair which was rather overwhelmed by the hugennd heavy fur coat draped over it, and Kate thought that the coatshould more properly be draped over the bed and its coldoccupant.

At last, walking as softly and cautiously as she could, shemoved into the room and over to the bed. She stood lookingdown at the face of the big, Nordic man. Though cold, andthough his eyes were shut, his face was frowning slightly as ifhe was still rather worried about something. This struck Kate asbeing almost infinitely sad. In life the man had had the air ofsomeone who was beset by huge, if somewhat puzzling,difficulties, and the appearance that he had almost immediatelyfound things beyond this life that were a bother to him as wellwas miserable to contemplate.

She was astonished that he appeared to be so unscathed. Hisskin was totally unmarked. It was rugged and healthy - or ratherhad been healthy until very recently. Closer inspection showed anetwork of fine lines which suggested that he was older than themid-thirties she had originally assumed. He could even havebeen a very fit and healthy man in his late forties.

Standing against the wall, by the door, was somethingunexpected. It was a large Coca-Cola vending machine. It didn’tlook as if it had been installed there: it wasn’t plugged in and ithad a small neat sticker on it explaining that it was temporarilyout of order. It looked as if it had simply been left thereinadvenently by someone who was probably even now walkingaround wondering which room he had left it in. Its large red andwhite wavy panel stared glassily into the room and did notexplain itself. The only thing the machine communicated to theoutside world was that there was a slot into which coins of avariety of denominations might be inserted, and an aperture towhich a variety of different cans would be delivered if themachine was working, which it was not. There was also an oldsledge-hammer leaning against it which was, in its own way,odd.

Faintness began to creep over Kate, the room began todevelop a slight spin, and there was some restless rustling in thecabin trunks of her mind.

Then she realised that the rustling wasn’t simply herimagination. There was a distinct noise in the room - a

heavy,beating, scratching noise, a muffled fluttering. The noise roseand fell like the wind, but in her dazed and woozy state, Katecould not at first tell where the noise was coming from. At lasther gaze fell on the curtains. She stared at them with the worriedfrown of a drunk trying to work out why the door is dancing.The sound was coming from the curtains. She walkeduncertainly towards them and pulled them apart. A huge eaglewith circles tattooed on its wings was clattering and beatingagainst the window, staring in with great yellow eyes andpecking wildly at the glass.

Kate staggered back, turned and tried to heave herself out ofthe room. At the end of the corridor the porthole doors swungopen and two figures came through them. Hands rushed towardsher as she became hopelessly entangled in the drip stand andbegan slowly to spin towards the floor.

She was unconscious as they carefully laid her back in herbed. She was unconscious half an hour later when a disturbinglyshort figure in a worryingly long white doctor's coat arrived,wheeled the big man away on a stretcher trolley and thenreturned after a few minutes for the Coca-Cola machine.

She woke a few hours later with a wintry sun seeping throughthe window. The day looked very quiet and ordinary, but Katewas still shaking.

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Chapter 3

The same sun later broke in through the upper windows of ahouse in North London and struck the peacefully sleeping figureof a man.

The room in which he slept was large and bedraggled and didnot much benefit from the sudden intrusion of light. The suncrept slowly across the bedclothes, as if nervous of what it mightfind amongst them, slunk down the side of the bed, moved in arather startled way across some objects it encountered on thefloor, toyed nervously with a couple of motes of dust, lit brieflyon a stuffed fruitbat hanging in the corner, and fled.

This was about as big an appearance as the sun ever put inhere, and it lasted for about an hour or so, during which time thesleeping figure scarcely stirred.

At eleven o'clock the phone rang, and still the figure did notrespond, any more than it had responded when the phone hadrung at twenty-five to seven in the morning, again at twenty toseven, again at ten to seven, and again for ten minutescontinuously starting at five to seven, after which it has settledinto a long and significant silence, disturbed only by the brayingof police sirens in a nearby street at around nine o'clock, thedelivery of a large eighteenth-century dual manual harpsichordat around nine-fifteen, and the collection of same by bailiffs at alittle after ten. This was a not uncommon sort of occurrence-the people concerned were accustomed to finding the key underthe doormat, and the man in the bed was accustomed to sleepingthrough it. You would probably not say that he was sleeping thesleep of the just, unless you meant the just asleep, but it wascertainly the sleep of someone who was not fooling about whenhe climbed into bed of a night and turned off the light.

The room was not a room to elevate the soul. Louis XIV, topick a name at random, would not have liked it, would havefound it not sunny enough, and insufficiently full of mirrors. Hewould have desired someone to pick up the socks, put therecords away, and maybe burn the place down. Michelangelowould have been distressed by its proponions, which wereneither lofty nor shaped by any noticeable inner harmony orsymmetry, other than that all parts of the room were pretty muchequally full of old coffee mugs, shoes and brimming ashtrays,most of which were now sharing their tasks with each other. Thewalls were painted in almost precisely that shade of green whichRaffaello Sanzio would have bitten off his own right

hand at thewrist rather than use, and Hercules, on seeing the room, wouldprobably have returned half an hour later armed with a navigableriver. It was, in short, a dump, and was likely to remain so for aslong as it remained in the custody of Mr Svlad, or "Dirk",Gently, n Cjelli.

At last Gently stirred.

The sheets and blankets were pulled up tightly around hishead, but from somewhere half way down the length of the beda hand slowly emerged from under the bedclothes and its fingersfelt their way in little tapping movements along the floor.Working from experience, they neatly circumvented a bowl ofsornething very nasty that had been sitting there sinceMichaelmas, and eventually happened upon a half-empty packof untipped Gauloises and a box of matches. The fingers shook acrumpled white tube free of the pack, seized it and the box ofmatches, and then started to poke a way through the sheetstangled together at the top of the bed, like a magician proddingat a handkerchief from which he intends to release a flock ofdoves.

The cigarette was at last inserted into the hole. The cigarettewas lit. For a while the bed itself appeared to be smoking thecigarette in great heaving drags. It coughed long, loud andshudderingly and then began at last to breathe in a moremeasured rhythm. In this way, Dirk Gently achievedconsciousness.

He lay there for a while feeling a terrible sense of worry andguilt about something weighing on his shoulders. He wished hecould forget about it, and promptly did. He levered himself outof bed and a few minutes later padded downstairs.

The mail on the doormat consisted of the usual things: a rudeletter threatening to take away his American Express card, aninvitation to apply for an American Express card, and a few billsof the more hysterical and unrealistic type. He couldn'tunderstand why they kept sending them. The cost of the postageseemed merely to be good money thrown after bad. He shookhis head in wonderment at the malevolent incompetence of theworld, threw the mail away, entered the kitchen and approachedthe fridge with caution.

It stood in the corner.

The kitchen was large and shrouded in a deep gloom that wasnot relieved, only turned yellow, by the action of switching onthe light. Dirk squatted down in front of the fridge and carefullyexamined the edge of the door. He found what he was lookingfor. In fact he found more than he was looking for.

Near the bottom of the door, across the narrow gap whichseparated the door from the main body of the fridge, which heldthe strip of grey insulating rubber, lay a single human hair. Itwas stuck there with dried saliva. That he had expected. He hadstuck it there himself three days earlier and had checked it onseveral occasions since then. What he had not expected to finewas a second hair.

He frowned at it in alarm. A second hair?

It was stuck across the gap in the same way as the first one,only this hair was near the top of the fridge door, and he had notput it there. He peered at it closely, and even went so far as to goand open the old shutters on the kitchen windows to let someextra light in upon the scene.

The daylight shouldered its way in like a squad of poiicemen,and did a lot of what's-all-thising around the room which, likethe bedroom, would have presented anyone of an aestheticdisposition with difficulties. Like most of the rooms in Dirk'shouse it was large, looming and utterly dishevelled. It simplysneered at anyone's attempts to tidy it, sneered at them andbrushed them aside like one of the small pile of dead anddisheartened flies that lay beneath the window, on top of a pileof old pizza boxes.

The light revealed the second hair for what it was - a greyhair at root, dyed a vivid metallic orange. Dirk pursed his lipsand thought very deeply. He didn't need to think hard in order torealise who the hair belonged to - there was only one personwho regularly entered the kitchen looking as if her head hadbeen used for extracting metal oxides from industrial waste - buthe did have seriously to consider the implications of thediscovery that she had been plastering her hair across the door ofhis fridge.

It meant that the silently waged conflict between himself andhis cleaning lady had escalated to a new and more frighteninglevel. It was now, Dirk reckoned, fully three months since thisfridge door had been opened, and each of them was grimlydetermined not to be the one to open it first. The fridge no longermerely stood there in the comer of the kitchen, it actuallylurked. Dirk could quite clearly remember the day on which thething had started lurking. It was about a week ago, when Dirkhad tried a simple subterfuge to trick Elena - the old bat's namewas Elena, pronounced to rhyme with cleaner, which was anirony that Dirk now no longer relished - into opening the fridgedoor. The subterfuge had been deftly deflected and had nearlyrebounded horribly on Dirk.

He had resorted to the strategy of going to the localmini-market to buy a few simple groceries. Nothing contentious- a little milk, some eggs, some bacon, a carton or two ofchocolate custard and a simple half-pound of butter. He had leftthem, innocently, on top of the fridge as if to say, “Oh, whenyou have a moment, perhaps you could pop these inside…”

When he had returned that evening his heart bounded to seethat they were no longer on top of the fridge. They were gone! They had not been merely moved aside or put on a shelf, theywere nowhere to be seen. She must finally have capitulated andput them away. In the fridge. And she would surely havecleaned it out once it was actually open. For the first and onlytime his heart swelled with warmth and gratitude towards her,and he was about to fling open the door of the thing in relief andtriumph when an eighth sense (at the last count, Dirk reckonedhe had eleven) warned him to be very, very careful, and toconsider first where Elena might have put the cleared outcontents of the fridge.

A nameless doubt gnawed at his mind as he movednoiselessly towards the garbage bin beneath the sink. Holdinghis breath, he opened the lid and looked.

There, nestling in the folds of the fresh black bin liner, werehis eggs, his bacon, his chocolate custard and his simplehalf-pound of butter. Two milk bottles stood rinsed and neatlylined up by the sink into which their contents had presumablybeen poured.

She had thrown it away.

Rather than open the fridge door, she had thrown his foodaway. He looked round slowly at the grimy, squat, whitemonolith, and that was the exact moment at which he realisedwithout a shadow of a doubt that his fridge had now begunseriously to lurk.

He made himself a stiff black coffee and sat, slightlytrembling. He had not even looked directly at the sink, but heknew that he must unconsciously have noticed the two cleanmilk bottles there, and some busy part of his mind had beenalarmed by them.

The next day he had explained all this away to himself. Hewas becoming needlessly paranoiac. It had surely been aninnocent or careless mistake on Elena’s part. She had probablybeen brooding distractedly on her son’s attack of bronchitispeevishness or homosexuality or whatever it was that regularlyprevented her from either turning up, or from having noticeableeffect when she did. She was Italian and probably hadabsent-mindedly mistaken his food for garbage.

But the business with the hair changed all that. It

establishedbeyond all possible doubt that she knew exactly what she wasdoing. She was under no circumstamces going to open the fridgedoor until he had opened it first, and he was under nocircumstances going to open the fridge until she had.

Obviously she had not noticed his hair, otherwise it wouldhave been her most effective course simply to pull it off, thustricking him into thinking she had opened the fridge. He shuuldpresumably now remove her hair in the hope of pulling thatsame trick on her, but even as he sat there he knew thatsomehow that wouldn't work, and that they were locked into atightening spiral of non-fridge-opening that would lead themboth to madness or perdition.

He wondered if he could hire someone to come and open thefridge.

No. He was not in a position to hire anybody to do anything.He was not even in a position to pay Elena for the last threeweeks. The only reason he didn't ask her to leave was thatsacking somebody inevitably involved paying them off, and thishe was in no position to do. His secretary had finally left him onher own initiative and gone off to do something reprehensible inthe travel business. Dirk had attempted to cast scon on herpreferring monotony of pay over-

"Regularity of pay," she had calmly corrected him.

- over job satisfaction.

She had nearly said, "Over what?", but at that moment sherealised that if she said that she would have to listen to his reply,which would be bound to infuriate her into arguing back. Itoccurred to her for the first time that the only way of escapingwas just not to get drawn into these arguments. If she simply didnot respond this time, then she was free to leave. She tried it.She felt a sudden freedom. She left. A week later, in much thesame mood, she married an airline cabin steward called Smith.

Dirk had kicked her desk over, and then had to pick it uphimself later when she didn't come back.

The detective business was currently as brisk as the tomb.Nobody, it seemed, wished to have anything detected. He hadrecently, to make ends meet, taken up doing palmistry in drag onThursday evenings, but he wasn't comfortable with it. He couldhave withstood it - the hateful, abject humiliation of it all wassomething to which he had, in different ways, now becomeaccustomed, and he was quite anonymous in his little tent in theback garden of the pub - he could have withstood it all if hehadn't been so horribly, excruciatingly good at it. It made himbreak out in a sweat of self loathing. He tried by every means

tocheat, to fake, to be deliberately and cynically bad, but whateverfakery he tried to introduce always failed and he invariablyended up being right.

His worst moment had come about as a result of the poorwoman from Oxfordshiie who had come in to see him oneevening. Being in something of a waggish mood, he hadsuggested that she should keep an eye on her husband, who,judging by her mamage line, looked to be a bit of a flighty type.It transpired that her husband was in fact a fighter pilot, and thathis plane had been lost in an exerrise over the North Sea only afortnight earlier.

Dirk had been flustered by this and had soothedmeaninglessly at her. He was certain, he said, that her husbandwould be restored to her in the fullness of time, that all would bewell, and that all manner of things would be well and so on. Thewoman said that she thought this was not very likely seeing asthe world record for staying alive in the North Sea was ratherless than an hour, and since no trace of her husband had beenfound in two weeks it seemed fanciful to imagine that he wasanything other than stone dead, and she was trying to get used tothe idea, thank you very much. She said it rather tartly.

Dirk had lost all control at this point and started to babble.

He said that it was very clear from reading her hands that thegreat sum of money she had coming to her would be noconsolation to her for the loss of her dear, dear husband, but thatat least it might comfort her to know that he had gone on to thatgreat something or other in the sky, that he was floating on thefleeciest of white clouds, looking very handsome in his new setof wings, and that he was terribly sorry to be talking suchappalling drivel but she had caught him rather by surprise.Would she care for some tea, or some vodka, or some soup?

The woman demurred. She said she had only wandered intothe tent by accident, she had been looking for the lavatories, andwhat was that about the money?

“Complete gibberish,” Dirk had explained. He was in greatdifficulties, what with having the falsetto to keep up. “I wasmaking it up as I went along,” he said. “Please allow me totender my most profound apologies for intruding so clumsily onyour private grief, and to escort you to, er, or rather, direct youto the, well, what I can only in the circumstances call thelavatory, which is out of the tent and on the left.”

Dirk had been cast down by this encounter, but was thenutterly horrified a few days later when he discovered that

thevery following morning the unfonunate woman had learnt thatshe had won ?250,000 on the Premium Bonds. He spent severalhours that night standing on the roof of his house, shaking hisfist at the dark sky and shouting, “Stop it!” until a neighbourcomplained to the police that he couldn’t sleep. The police hadcome round in a screaming squad car and woken up the rest ofthe neighbourhood as well.

Today, this morning, Dirk sat in his kitchen and stareddejectedly at his fridge. The bloody-minded ebullience which heusually relied on to carry him through the day had been knockedout of him in its very opening moments by the business with thefridge. His will sat imprisoned in it, locked up by a single hair.

What he needed, he thought, was a client. Please, God, hethought, if there is a god, any god, bring me a client. Just asimple client, the simpler the better. Credulous and rich.Someone like that chap yesterday. He tapped his fingers on thetable.

The problem was that the more credulous the client, the moreDirk fell foul at the end of his own better nature, which wasconstantly rearing up and embarrassing him at the mostinopportune moments. Dirk frequently threatened to hurl hisbetter nature to the ground and kneel on its windpipe, but itusually managed to get the better of him by dressing itself up asguilt and self loathing, in which guise it could throw him rightout of the ring.

Credulous and rich. Just so that he could pay off some,perhaps even just one, of the more prominent and sensationalbills. He lit a cigarette. The smoke curled upwards in themoming light and attached itself to the ceiling.

Like that chap yesterday. . .

He paused.

The chap yesterday. . .

The world held its breath.

Quietly and gently there settled on him the knowledge thatsomething, somewhere, was ghastly. Something was terriblywrong. There was a disaster hanging silently in the air around himwaiting for him to notice it. His knees tingled. What he needed, he had been thinking, was a client. He hadbeen thinking that as a matter of habit. It was what he alwaysthought at this time of the morning. What he had forgotten wasthat he had one. He stared wildly at his watch. Nearly eleven-thirty. He shookhis head to try and clear the silent ringing between his ears, thenmade a hysterical lunge for his hat and his great leather coat

thathung behind the door. Fifteen seconds later he left the house, five hours late butmoving fast.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 4

A minute or two later Dirk paused to consider his best strategy.Rather than arrive five hours late and flustered it would be betterall round if he were to arrive five hours and a few extra minuteslate, but triumphantly in command.

“Pray God I am not too soon!” would be a good opening lineas he swept in, but it needed a good follow-through as well, andhe wasn’t sure what it should be.

Perhaps it would save time if he went back to get his car, butthen again it was only a short distance, and he had a tremendouspropensity for getting lost when driving. This was largelybecause of his method of “Zen” navigation, which was simply tofind any car that looked as if it knew where it was going andfollow it. The results were more often surprising than successful,but he felt it was worth it for the sake of the few occasions whenit was both.

Furthermore he was not at all certain that his car was working.

It was an elderly Jaguar, built at that very special time in thecompany’s history when they were making cars which had tostop for repairs more often than they needed to stop for petrol,and frequently needed to rest for months between outings. Hewas, however, certain, now that he came to think about it, thatthe car didn’t have any petrol and furthermore he did not haveany cash or valid plastic to enable him to fill it up.

He abandoned that line of thought as wholly fruitless.

He stopped to buy a newspaper while he thought things over.The clock in the newsagent’s said eleven thirty-five. Damndamn, damn. He toyed with the idea of simply dropping thecase. Just walking away and forgetting about it. Having somelunch. The whole thing was fraught with difficulties in anyevent. Or rather it was fraught with one particular difficultywhich was that of keeping a straight face. The whole thing wascomplete and utter nonsense. The client was clearly loopy andDirk would not have considered taking the case except for onevery important thing.

Three hundred pounds a day plus expenses.

The client had agreed to it just like that. And when Dirk hadstarted his usual speech to the effect that his methods, involvingas they did the fundamental interconnectedness of all things,often led to expenses that might appear to the untutored eye tobe somewhat tangential to the matter in hand, the client

hadsimply waved the matter aside as trifling. Dirk liked that in aclient.

The only thing the client had insisted upon in the midst of thisalmost superhuman fit of reasonableness was that Dirk had to bethere, absolutely had, had, had to be there ready, functioning andalert, without fail, without even the merest smidgen of an inklingof failure, at six-thirty in the morning. Absolute.

Well, he was just going to have to see reason about that aswell. Six-thirty was clearly a preposterous time and he, theclient, obviously hadn't meant it seriously. A civilised six-thirtyfor twelve noon was almost certainly what he had in mind, andif he wanted to cut up rough about it, Dirk would have no optionbut to start handing out some serious statistics. Nobody gotmurdered before lunch. But nobody. People weren't up to it.You needed a good lunch to get both the blood-sugar and blood-lust levels up. Dirk had the figures to prove it.

Did he, Anstey (the client's name was Anstey, an odd, intenseman in his mid-thirties with staring eyes, a narrow yellow tieand one of the big houses in Lupton Road; Dirk hadn't actuallyliked him very much and thought he looked as if he was tryingto swallow a fish), did he know that 67 per cent of all knownmurderers, who expressed a preference, had had liver and baconfor lunch? And that another 22 per cent had been torn betweeneither a prawn biryani or an omelette? That dispensed with 89per cent of the threat at a stroke, and by the time you had furtherdiscounted the salad eaters and the turkey and ham sandwichmunchers and started to look at the number of people whowould contemplate such a course of action without any lunch atall, then you were well into the realms of negligibility andbordering on fantasy.

After two-thirty, but nearer to three o'clock, was when youhad to start being on your guard. Seriously. Even on good days.Even when you weren't receiving death threats from strangegigantic men with green eyes, you had to watch people like ahawk after the lunching hour. The really dangerous time wasafter four o'clockish, when the streets began to fill up withmarauding packs of publishers and agents, maddened withfettucine and kir and baying for cabs. Those were the times thattested men's souls. Six-thirty in the morning? Forget it. Dirkhad.

With his resolve well stiffened Dirk stepped back out of thenewsagent's into the nippy air of the street and strode off.

"Ah, I expect you'll be wanting to pay for that paper, then,won't you, Mr Dirk, sir?" said the newsagent, trotting gentlyafter him.

“Ah, Bates,” said Dirk loftily, “you and your expectations.Always expecting this and expecting that. May I recommendserenity to you? A life that is burdened with expectations is aheavy life. Its fruit is sorrow and disappointment. Learn to beone with the joy of the moment.”

“I thirtk it’s twenty pence that one, sir,” said Bates, tranquilly.

“Tell you what I’ll do, Bates, seeing as it’s you. Do you havea pen on you at all? A simple ball-point will suffice.”

Bates produced one from an inner pocket and handed it toDirk, who then tore off the corner of the paper on which theprice was printed and scribbled “IOU” above it. He handed thescrap of paper to the newsagent.

“Shall I put this with the others, then, sir?”

“Put it wherever it will give you the greatest joy, dear Bates, Iwould want you to put it nowhere less. For now, dear man,farewell.”

“I expect you’ll be wanting to give me back my pen as wellMr Dirk.”

“When the times are propitious for such a transaction, mydear Bates,” said Dirk, “you may depend upon it. For themoment, higher purposes call it. Joy, Bates, great joy. Bates,please let go of it.”

After one last listless tug, the little man shrugged and paddedback towards his shop.

“I expect I’ll be seeing you later, then, Mr Dirk,” he calledout over his shoulder, without enthusiasm.

Dirk gave a gracious bow of his head to the man’s retreatingback, and then hurried on, opening the newspaper at thehoroscope page as he did so.

“Virtually evervthing you decide today will be wrong,” it saidbluntly.

Dirk slapped the paper shut with a grunt. He did not for asecond hold with the notion that great whirling lumps of rocklight years away knew something about your day that youdidn’t. It just so happened that “The Great Zaganza” was an oldfriend of his who knew when Dirk’s birthday was, and alwayswrote his column deliberately to wind him up. The paper’scirculation had dropped by nearly a twelfth since he had takenover doing the horoscope, and only Dirk and The Great Zaganzaknew why.

He hurried on, flapping his way quickly through the rest ofthe paper. As usual, there was nothing interesting. A lot of stuffabout the search for Janice Smith, the missing airline girl fromHeathrow, and how she could possibly have disappeared

justlike that. They printed the latest picture of her, which was on aswing with pigtails, aged six. Her father, a Mr Jim Pearce, wasquoted as saying it was quite a good likeness, but she had grownup a lot now and was usually in better focus. Impatiently, Dirktucked the paper under his arm and strode onwards, his thoughtson a much more interesting topic.

Three hundred pounds a day. Plus expenses.

He wondered how long he could reasonably expect to sustainin Mr Anstey his strange delusions that he was about to bemurdered by a seven foot tall, shaggy-haired creature with hugegreen eyes and horns, who habitually waved things at him: acontract written in some incomprehensible language and signedwith a splash of blood, and also a kind of scythe. The othernotable feature of this creature was that no one other than his cli-ent had been able to see it, which Mr Anstey dismissed as a trickof the light.

Three days? Four? Dirk didn't think he'd be able to manage awhole week with a straight face, but he was already looking atsomething like a grand for his trouble. And he would stick a newfridge down on the list of tangential but non-negotiableexpenses. That would be a good one. Getting the old fridgethrown out was definitely part of the interconnectedness of allthings.

He began to whistle at the thought of simply getting someoneto come round and cart the thing away, turned into Lupton Roadand was surprised at all the police cars there. And theambulance. He didn't like them being there. It didn't feel right.It didn't sit comfortably in his mind alongside his visions of anew fridge.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 5

Dirk knew Lupton Road. It was a wide tree-lined affair, withlarge late-Victorian terraces which stood tall and sturdily andresented police cars. Resented them if they tumed up innumbers, that is, and if their lights were flashing. Theinhabitants of Lupton Road liked to see a nice, well-turned-outsingle police car patrolling up and down the street in a cheerfuland robust manner - it kept property values cheerful and robusttoo. But the moment the lights started flashing in thatknuckle-whitening blue, they cast their pallor not only on theneatly pointed bricks that they flashed across, but also on thevery values those bricks represented.

Anxious faces peered from behind the glass of neighbouringwindows, and were irradiated by the blue strobes.

There were three of them, three police cars left askew acrossthe road in a way that transcended mere parking. It sent out amassive signal to the world saying that the law was here nowtaking charge of things, and that anyone who just had normal,good and cheerful business to conduct in Lupton Road could justfuck off.

Dirk hurried up the road, sweat pricking at him beneath hisheavy leather coat. A police constable loomed up ahead of himwith his arms spread out, playing at being a stop barrier, butDirk swept him aside in a torrent of words to which theconstable was unable to come up with a good response off thetop of his head. Dirk sped on to the house.

At the door another policeman stopped him, and Dirk wasabout to wave an expired Marks and Spencer charge card at himwith a deft little flick of the wrist that he had practised for hoursin front of a mirror on those long evenings when nothing muchelse was on, when the officer suddenly said, “Hey, is your nameGently?”

Dirk blinked at him warily. He made a slight grunting noisethat could be either “yes” or “no” depending on thecircumstances.

“Because the Chief has been looking for you.”

“Has he?” said Dirk.

“I recognised you from his description,” said the officerlooking him up and down with a slight smirk.

“In fact,” continued the officer, “he’s been using your namein a manner that some might find highly offensive. He even sentBig Bob the Finder off in a car to find you. I can tell that hedidn’t find

you from the fact that you're looking reasonablywell. Lot of people get found by Big Bob the Finder, they comein a bit wobbly. Just about able to help us with our enquiries butthat's about all. You'd better go in. Rather you than me," headded quietly.

Dirk glanced at the house. The stripped-pine shutters wereclosed across all the windows. Though in all other respects thehouse seemed well cared for, groomed into a state of clean,well-pointed aftluence, the closed shutters seemed to convey anair of sudden devastation.

Oddly, there seemed to be music coming from the basement,or rather, just a single disjointed phrase of thumping musicbeing repeated over and over again. It sounded as if the stylushad got stuck in the groove of a record, and Dirk wondered whyno one had turned it off, or at least nudged the stylus along sothat the record could continue. The song seemed very vaguelyfamiliar and Dirk guessed that he had probably heard it on theradio recently, though he couldn't place it. The fragment of lyricseemed to be something like:

"Don't pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

"Don't pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

"Don't pick it up, pick it up, pick i - " and so on.

"You'll be wanting to go down to the basement," said theofficer impassively, as if that was the last thing that anyone intheir right mind would be wanting to do.

Dirk nodded to him curtly and hurried up the steps to thefront door, which was standing slightly ajar. He shook his headand clenched his shoulders to try and stop his brain fluttering.

He went in.

The hallway spoke of prosperity imposed on a taste that hadoriginally been formed by student living. The floors werestripped boards heavily polyurethaned, the walls white withGreek rugs hung on them, but expensive Greek rugs. Dirk wouldbe prepared to bet (though probably not to pay up) that athorough search of the house would reveal, amongst who knewwhat other dark secrets, five hundred British Telecom shares anda set of Dylan albums that was complete up to Blood on theTracks.

Another policeman was standing in the hall. He lookedterribly young, and he was leaning very slightly back against thewall, staring at the floor and holding his helmet against hisstomach. His face was pale and shiny. He looked at Dirkblankly, and nodded faintly in the direction of the stairs leadingdown.

Up the stairs came the repeated sound:

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-“

Dirk was trembling with a rage that was barging aroundinside him loooking for something to hit or throttle. He wishedthat he could hotly deny that any of this was his fault, but untilanybody tried to assert that it was, he couldn’t.

“How long have you been here?” he said curtly.

The young policeman had to gather himself together toanswer.

“We arrived about half-hour ago,” he replied in a thick voice.”Hell of a morning. Rushing around.”

“Don’t tell me about rushing around,” said Dirk, completelymeaninglessly. He launched himself down the stars.

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-“

At the bottom there was a narrow corridor. The main door offit was heavily cracked and hanging off its hinges. It opened intoa large double room. Dirk was about to enter when a figureemerged from it and stood barring his way.

“I hate the fact that this case has got you mixed up in it,” saidthe figure, “I hate it very much. Tell me what you’ve got to dowith it so I know exactly what it is I’m hating.”

Dirk stared at the neat, thin face in astonishment.

“Gilks?” he said.

“Don’t stand there looking like a startled whatsisname, whatare those things what aren’t seals? Much worse than seals. Bigblubbery things. Dugongs. Don’t stand there looking like astartled dugong. Why has that…” Gilks pointed into the roombehind him, “why has that. . .man in there got your name andteIephone number on an envelope full uf money?”

“How m…” started Dirk. “How, may I ask, do you come tobe here, Gilks? What are you doing so far from the Fens?Surprised you find it dank enough for you here.”

“Three hundred pounds,” said Gilks. “Why?”

“Perhaps you would allow me to speak to my client,” saidDirk.

“Your client, eh?” said Gilks grimly. “Yes. All right. Whydon’t you speak to him? I’d be interested to hear what you haveto say.” He stood back stiffly, and waved Dirk into the room.

Dirk gathered his thoughts and entered the room in a state ofcontrolled composure which lasted for just over a second.

Most of his client was sitting quietly in a comfortable chair infront of the hi-fi. The chair was placed in the optimal listeningposition - about twice as far back from the speakers as thedistance between them, which is generally considered to be idealfor stereo imaging.

He seemed generally to be casual and relaxed with his legscrossed and a half-finished cup of coffee on the small tablebeside him. Distressingly, though, his head was sitting neatly onthe middle of the record which was revolving on the hi-fiturntable, with the tone arm snuggling up against the neck andconstantly being deflected back into the same groove. As thehead revolved it seemed once every 1.8 seconds or so to shootDirk a reproachful glance, as if to say, “See what happens whenyou don’t turn up on time like I asked you to,” then it wouldsweep on round to the wall, round, round, and back to the frontagain with more reproach.

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-“

The room swayed a little around Dirk, and he put his hand outagainst the wall to steady it.

“Was there any particular service you were engaged toprovide for your client?” said Gilks behind him, very quietly.

“Oh, er, just a small matter,” said Dirk weakly. “Nothingconnected with all this. No, he, er, didn’t mention any of thiskind of thing at all. Well, look, I can see you’re busy, I think I’dbetter just collect my fee and leave. You say he left it out forme?”

Having said this, Dirk sat heavily on a small bentwood chairstanding behind him, and broke it.

Gilks hauled him back to his feet again, and propped himagainst the wall. Briefly he left the room, then came back with asmall jug of water and a glass on a tray. He poured some waterinto the glass, took it to Dirk and threw it at him.

“Better?”

“No,” spluttered Dirk, “can’t you at least turn the record off?”

“That”s forensic’s job. Can’t touch anything till the cleverdicks have been. Maybe that’s them now. Go out on to the patioand get some air. Chain yourself to the railing and beat yourselfup a little, I’m pushed for time myself. And try to look lessgreen, will you? It’s not your colour.”

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-“

Gilks turned round, looking tired and cross, and was about togo out and up the stairs to meet the newcomers whose voicescould be heard up on the ground floor, when he paused andwatched the head revolving patiently on its heavy platter for afew seconds.

“You know,” he said at last, “these smart-alec show-offsuicides really make me tired. They only do it to annoy.”

“Suicide?” said Dirk.

Gilks glanced round at him.

“Windows secured with iron bars half an inch thick,” he said.”Door locked from the inside with the key still in the lock.Furniture piled against the inside of the door. French windows tothe patio locked with mortice door bolts. No signs of a tunnel. Ifit was murder then the murderer must have stopped to do a damnfine job of glazing on the way out. Except that all the putty’s oldnnd painted over.

“No. Nobody’s left this room, and nobody’s broken into itexcept for us, and I’m pretty sure we didn’t do it.

“I haven’t time to fiddle around on this one. Obviouslysuicide; and just done to be difficult. I’ve half a mind to do thedeceased for wasting police time. Tell you what,” he said,glancing at his watch, “you’ve got ten minutes. If you come upwith a plausible explanation of how he did it that I can put in myreport, I’ll let you keep the evidence in the envelope minus 20per cent compensation to me for the emotional wear and tearinvolved in not punching you in the mouth.”

Dirk wondered for a moment whether or not to mention thevisits his client claimed to have received from a strange andviolent green-eyed, fur-clad giant who regularly emerged out ofnowhere bellowing about contracts and obligations and waving athree foot glittering-edged scythe, but decided, on balance, no.

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-“

He was seething at himself at last. He had not been able toseethe at himself properly over the death of his client because itwas too huge and horrific a burden to bear. But now he had beenhumiliated by Gilks, and found himself in too wobbly anddisturbed a state to fight back, so he was able to seethe athimself about that.

He turned sharply away from his tormentor and let himselfout into the patio garden to be alone with his seethings.

The patio was a small, paved, west-facing area at the rearwhich was largely deprived of light, cut off as it was by the highback wall of the house and by the high wall of some industrialbuilding that backed on to the rear. In the middle of it stood, forwho knew what possible reason, a stone sundial. If any light ataIl fell on the sundial you would know that it was pretty close tonoon, GMT. Other than that, birds perched on it. A few plantssulked in pots.

Dirk jabbed a cigarette in his mouth and burnt a lot of the endof it fiercely.

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-” still nagged frominside the house.

Neat garden walls separated the patio on either side trom thegardens of neighbouring houses. The one to the left was thesame size as this one, the one to the right extended a littlefurther, benefiting from the fact that the industrial buildingfinished flush with the intervening garden wall. There was an airof well-kemptness. Nothing grand, nothing flashy, just a sensethat all was well and that upkeep on the houses was no problem.The house to the right, in particular, looked as if it had had itsbrickwork repointed quite recently, and its windows reglossed.

Dirk took a large gulp of air and stood for a second staring upinto what could be seen of the sky, which was grey and hazy. Asingle dark speck was wheeling against the underside of theclouds. Dirk watched this for a while, glad of any focus for histhoughts other than the horrors of the room he had just left. Hewas vaguely aware of comings and goings within the room, of acertain amount of tape-measuring happening, of a feeling thatphotographs were being taken, and that severed-head-removalactivities were taking place.

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pick it up, pick it up, pick i-

“Don’t pi - “

Somebody at last picked it up, the nagging repetition was atlast hushed, and now the gentle sound of a distant televisionfloated peacefully on the noontime air.

Dirk, however, was having a great deal of difficulty in takingit all in. He was much more aware of taking a succession ofhuge swimmy whacks to the head, which were the assaults ofguilt. It was not the normal background-noise type of guilt thatcomes from just being alive this far into the twentieth century,and which Dirk was usually fairly adept at dealing with. It wasan actual stunning sense of, “this specific terrible thing isspecifically and terribly my fault”. All the normal mental moveswouldn’t let him get out of the path of the huge pendulum.Wham it came again, whizz, wham, again and again, whamwham, wham.

He tried to remember any of the details of what his late client(wham, wham) had said (wham) to him (wham), but it was(wham) virtually impossible (wham) with all this whammingtaking place (wham). The man had said (wham) that (Dirk took adeep breath) (wham) he was being pursued (wham) by (wham) alarge, hairy, green-eyed monster armed with a

scythe.

Wham!

Dirk had secretly smiled to himself about this.

Whim, wham, whim, wham, whim, wham!

And had thought, “What a silly man.”

Whim, whim, whim, whim, wham!

A scythe (whom), and a contract (wham).

He hadn’t known, or even had the faintest idea as to what thecontract was for.

“Of course,” Dirk had thought (wham).

But he had a vague feeling that it might have something to dowith a potato. There was a bit of a complicated story attached tothat (whim, whim, whim).

Dirk had nodded seriously at this point (wham), and made areassuring tick (wham) on a pad which he kept on his desk(wham) for the express purpose of making reassuring ticks on(wham, wham, wham). He had prided himself at that moment onhaving managed to convey the impression that he had made atick in a small box marked “Potatoes”.

Wham, wham, wham, wham

Mr Anstey had said he would explain further about thepotatoes when Dirk arrived to carry out his task.

And Dirk had promised (whom), easily (wham), casually(wham), with an airy wave of his hand (wham, wham, wham), tobe there at six-thirty in the morning (wham), because thecontract (wham) fell due at seven o’clock.

Dirk remembered having made another tick in a notional”Potato contract falls due at 7.00 a.m.” box. (Wh…)

He couldn’t handle all this whamming any more. He couldn’tblame himself for what had happened. Well, he could. Of coursehe could. He did. It was, in fact, his fault (wham). The point wasthat he couldn’t continue to blame himself for what hadhappened and think clearly about it, which he was going to haveto do. He would have to dig this horrible thing (wham) up by theroots, and if he was going to be fit to do that he had somehow todivest himself (wham) of this whamming.

A huge wave of anger surged over him as he contemplatedhis predicament and the tangled distress of his life. He hated thisneat patio. He hated all this sundial stuff, and all these neatlypainted windows, all these hideously trim roofs. He wanted toblame it all on the paintwork rather than on himself, on therevoltingly tidy patio paving-stones, on the sheer disgustingabomination of the neatly repointed brickwork.

“Excuse me…”

“What?” He whirled round, caught unawares by this intrusioninto his private raging of a quiet polite voice.

“Are you connected with…?” The woman indicated all theunpleasantness and the lower-ground-floorness and the horriblesort of policeness of things next door to her with a little floatingmovement of her wrist. Her wrist wore a red bracelet whichmatched the frames of her glasses. She was looking over thegarden wall from the house on the right, with an air of stightlyanxious distaste.

Dirk glared at her speechlessly. She looked about forty-somethingish and neat, with an instant and unmistakable qualityof advertising about her.

She gave a troubled sigh.

“I know it’s probably all very terrible and everything,” shesaid, “but do you think it will take long? We only called in thepolice because the noise of that ghastly record was driving us upthe wall. It’s all a bit…”

She gave him a look of silent appeal, and Dirk decided that itcould all be her fault. She could, as far as he was concerned,take the blame for everything while he sorted it out. Shedeserved it; if only for wearing a bracelet like that.

Without a word, he turned his back on her, and took his furyback inside the house where it began rapidly to freeze intosomething hard and efficient.

“Gilks!” he said. “Your smart-alec suicide theory. I like it. Itworks for me. And I think I see how the clever bastard pulled itoff. Bring me pen. Bring me paper.”

He sat down with a flourish at the cherrywood farmhousetable which occupied the centre of the rear portion of the roomand deftly sketched out a scheme of events which involved anumber of household or kitchen implements, a swinging,weighted light fitting, some very precise timing, and hinged onthe vital fact that the record turntable was Japanese.

“That should keep your forensic chaps happy,” said Dirkbriskly to Gilks. The forensic chaps glanced at it, took in itssalient points and liked them. They were simple, implausible,and of exactly that nature which a coroner who liked the samesort of holidays in Marbella which they did would be sure torelish.

“Unless,” said Dirk casually, “you are interested in the notionthat the deceased had entered into some kind of diabolicalcontract with a supernatural agency for which payment was nowbeing exacted?”

The forensic chaps glanced at each other and shook

theirheads. There was a strong sense from them that the morning waswearing on and that this kind of talk was only introducingunnecessary complications into a case which otherwise could bewell behind them before lunch.

Dirk made a satisfied shrug, peeled off his share of the evidence and, with a final nod to the constabulary, made his wayback upstairs.

As he reached the hallway, it suddenly became apparent tohim that the gentle sounds of day-time television which he hadheard from out in the garden had previously been masked frominside by the insistent sound of the record stuck in its groove.

He was surprised now to realise that they were in fact comingfrom somewhere upstairs in this house. With a quick look roundto see that he was not observed he stood on the bottom step ofthe staircase leading to the upstairs floors of the house andglanced up them in surprise.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 6

The stairs were carpeted with a tastefully austere matting type ofsubstance. Dirk quietly made his way up them, past some tastefully dried large things in a pot that stood on the first landing,and looked into the rooms on the first floor. They, too, weretasteful and dried.

The larger of the two bedrooms was the only one that showedany signs of current use. It had clearly been designed to allowthe morning light to play on delicately arranged flowers andduvets stuffed with something like hay, but there was a feelingthat socks and used shaving heads were instead beginning togather the room into their grip. There was a distinct absence ofanything female in the room - the same sort of absence that amissing picture leaves behind it on a wall. There was an air oftension and of sadness and of things needing to be cleaned outfrom under the bed.

The bathroom, which opened out from it, had a gold dischung on the wall in front of the lavatory, for sales of fivehundred thousand copies of a record called Hot Potato by a bandcalled Pugilism and the Third Autistic Cuckoo. Dirk had a vaguerecollection of having read part of an interview with the leaderof the band (there were only two of them, and one of them wasthe leader) in a Sunday paper. He had been asked about theirname, and he had said that there was an interesting story aboutit, though it turned out not to be. “It can mean whatever peoplewant-it to mean,” he had added with a shrug from the sofa of hismanager’s office somewhere off Oxford Street.

Dirk remembered visualising the journalist nodding politelyand writing this down. A vile knot had formed in Dirk’s stomachwhich he had eventually softened with gin.

“Hot Potato… ” thought Dirk. It suddenly occurred to himlooking at the gold disc hanging in its red frame, that the recordon which the late Mr Anstey’s head had been perched wasobviously this one. Hot Potato. Don’t pick it up.

What could that mean?

Whatever people wanted it to mean, Dirk thought with bedgrace.

The other thing that he remembered now about the interviewwas that Pain (the leader of Pugilism and the Third AutisticCuckoo was called Pain) claimed to have written the lyrics downmore or less verbatim from a conversation which he orsomebody had overheard in a cafe or a sauna or an aeroplane

orsomething like that. Dirk wondered how the originators of theconversation would feel to hear their words being repeated in thecircumstances in which he had just heard them.

He peered more closely at the label in the centre of the goldrecord. At the top of the label it said simply, “ARRGH!”, whileunderneath the actual title were the writers’ credits - “Paignton,Mulville, Anstey”.

Mulville was presumably the member of Pugilism and theThird Autistic Cuckoo who wasn’t the leader. And GeoffAnstey’s inclusion on the writing credits of a major-sellingsingle was probably what had paid for this house. When Ansteyhad talked about the contract having something to do withPotato he had assumed that Dirk knew what he meant. And he,Dirk, had as easily assumed that Anstey was blithering. lt wasvery easy to assume that someone who was talking about green-eyed monsters with scythes was also blithering when he talkedabout potatoes.

Dirk sighed to himself with deep uneasiness. He took adislike to the neat way the trophy was hanging on the wall andadjusted it a little so that it hung at a more humane and untidyangle. Doing this caused an envelope to fall out from behind theframe and flutter towards the floor. Dirk tried unsuccessfully tocatch it. With an unfit grunt he bent over and picked the thingup.

It was a largish, cream envelope of rich, heavy paper, roughlyslit open at one end, and resealed with Sellotape. In fact itlooked as if it had been opened and resealed with fresh layers oftape many times, an impression which was borne out by thenumber of names to which the envelope had in its time beenaddressed - each successively crossed out and replaced byanother.

The last name on it was that of Geoff Anstey. At least Dirkassumed it was the last name because it was the only one thathad not been crossed out, and crossed out heavily. Dirk peeredat some of the other names, trying to make them out.

Some memory was stirred by a couple of the names which hecould just about discern, but he needed to examine the envelopemuch more closely. He had been meaning to buy himself amagnifying glass ever since he had become a detective, but hadnever got around to it. He also did not possess a penknife, soreluctantly he decided that the most prudent course was to tuckthe envelope away for the moment in one of the deeper recessesof his coat and examine it later in privacy.

He glanced quickly behind the frame of the gold disc to see ifany other goodies might emerge but was disappointed, and so

hequit the bathroom and resumed his exploration of the house.

The other bedroom was neat and soulless. Unused. A pinebed, a duvet and an old battered chest of drawers that had beenrevived by being plunged into a vat of acid were its mainfeatures. Dirk pulled the door of it closed behind him, andstarted to ascend the small, wobbly, white-painted stairway thatled up to an attic from which the sounds of Bugs Bunny couldbe heard.

At the top of the stairs was a minute landing which opened onone side into a bathroom so small that it would best be used bystanding outside and sticking into it whichever limb you wantedto wash. The door to it was kept ajar by a length of greenhosepipe which trailed from the cold tap of the wash-basin, outof the bathroom, across the landing and into the only other roomhere at the top of the house.

It was an attic room with a severely pitched roof whichoffered only a few spots where a person of anything approachingaverage height could stand up.

Dirk stood hunched in the doorway and surveyed its contents,nervous of what he might find amongst them. There was ageneral grunginess about the place. The curtains were closed andlittle light made it past them into the room, which was otherwiseilluminated only by the flickering glow of an animated rabbit.An unmade bed with dank, screwed-up sheets was pushed undera particularly low angle of the ceiling. Part of the walls and themore nearly vertical surfaces of the ceiling were covered withpictures crudely cut out of magazines.

There didn't seem to be any common theme or purposebehind the cuttings. As well as a couple of pictures of flashyGerman cars and the odd bra advertisement, there were also abadly torn picture of a fruit flan, part of an advertisement for lifeinsurance and other random fragments which suggested they hadbeen selected and arranged with a dull, bovine indifference toany meaning that any of them might have or effect they mightachieve.

The hosepipe curled across the floor and led around the sideof an elderly armchair pulled up in front of the television set.

The rabbit rampaged. The glow of his rampagings played onthe frayed edges of the armchair. Bugs was wrestling with thecontrols of an aeroplane which was plunging to the ground.Suddenly he saw a button marked "Autopilot" and pressed it. Acupboard opened and a robot pilot clambered out, took one lookat the situation and baled out. The plane hurtled on towards theground but, luckily, ran out of fuel just before reaching it and

sothe rabbit was saved.

Dirk could also see the top of a head.

The hair of this head was dark, matted and greasy. Dirkwatched it for a long, uneasy moment before advancing slowlyinto the room to see what, if anything, it was attached to. Hisrelief at discovering, as he rounded the armchair, that the headwas, after all, attached to a living body was a little marred by thesight of the living body to which it was attached.

Slumped in the armchair was a boy.

He was probably about thirteen or fourteen, and although hedidn't look ill in any specific physical way, he was definitely nota well person. His hair sagged on his head, his head sagged onhis shoulders, and he lay in the armchair in a sort of limp,crumpled way, as if he'd been hurled there from a passing train.He was dressed merely in a cheap leather jacket and sleeping-bag.

Dirk stared at him.

Who was he? What was a boy doing here watching televisionin a house where someone had just been decapitated? Did heknow what had happened? Did Gilks know about him? HadGilks even bothered to come up here? It was, after all, severalflights of stairs for a busy policeman with a tricky suicide on hishands.

After Dirk had been standing there for twenty seconds or so,the boy's eyes climbed up towards him, failed utterly toacknowledge him in any way at all, and then dropped again andlocked back on to the rabbit.

Dirk was unused to making quite such a minuscule impact onanybody. He checked to be sure that he did have his huge leathercoat and his absurd red hat on and that he was properly anddramatically silhouetted by the light of the doorway.

He felt momentarily deflated and said, "Er… " by way ofself introduction, but it didn't get the boy's attention. He didn'tlike this. The kid was deliberately and maliciously watchingtelevision at him. He frowned. There was a kind of steamytension building in the room it seemed to Dirk, a kind ofdifficult, hissing quality to the whole air of the place which hedid not know how to respond to. It rose in intensity and thensuddenly ended with an abrupt click which made Dirk start.

The boy unwound himself like a slow, fat snake, leanedsideways over the far side of the armchair and made someelaborate unseen preparations which clearly involved, as Dirknow realised, an electric kettle. When he resumed his earliersplayed posture it was with the addition of a plastic pot

clutchedin his right hand, from which he forked rubbery strands ofsteaming gunk into his mouth.

The rabbit brought his affairs to a conclusion and gave way toa jeering comedian who wished the viewers to buy a certainbrand of lager on the basis of nothing better than his own hardlydisinterested say-so.

Dirk felt that it was time to make a slightly greater impressionon the proceedings than he had so far managed to do. Hestepped forward dinectly into the boy's line of sight.

"Kid," Dirk said in a tone that he hoped would sound firm butgentle and not in any way at all patronising or affected orgauche, "I need to know who - "

He was distracted at that moment by the sight which met himfrom the new position in which he was standing. On the otherside of the armchair there was a large, half full catering-size boxof Pot Noodles, a large, half full catering-size box of Mars Bars,a half demolished pyramid of cans of soft drink, and the end ofthe hosepipe. The hosepipe ended in a plastic tap nozzle, andwas obviously used for refilling the kettle.

Dirk had simply been going to ask the boy who he was, butseen from this angle the family resemblance was unmistakable.He was clearly the son of the lately decapitated GeoffreyAnstey. Perhaps this behaviour was just his way of dealing withshock. Or perhaps he really didn't know what had happened. Orperhaps he…

Dirk hardly liked to think.

In fact he was finding it hard to think clearly while thetelevision beside him was, on behalf of a toothpaste manufacturing company, trying to worry him deeply about some ofthe things which might be going on in his mouth.

"OK," he said, "I don't like to disturb you at what I knowmust be a difficult and distressing time for you, but I need toknow first of all if you actually realise that this is a difficult anddistressing time for you."

Nothing.

All right, thought Dirk, time for a little judicious toughness.He leant back against the wall, stuck his hands in his pockets inan OK-if-that's-the-way-you-want-to-play-it manner, staredmoodily at the floor for a few seconds, then swung his head upand let the boy have a hard look right between the eyes.

"I have to tell you, kid," he said tersely, "your father's dead."

This might have worked if it hadn't been for a very popularand long-running commercial which started at that moment. Itseemed to Dirk to be a particularly astounding

example of thegenre.

The opening sequence showed the angel Lucifer being hurledfrom heaven into the pit of hell where he then lay on a buminglake until a passing demon amved and gave him a can of a fizzysoft drink called sHades. Lucifer took it and tried it. He greedilyguzzled the whole contents of the can and then tumed to camera,slipped on some Porsche design sunglasses, said, “Now we’rereally cookin’!” and lay back basking in the glow of the burningcoals being heaped around him.

At that point an impossibly deep and growly American voice,which sounded as if it had itself crawled from the pit of hel1, orat least from a Soho basement drinking club to which it waskeen to return as soon as possible to marinade itself into shapefor the next voice-over, said, “sHades. The Drink from Hell… “and the can revolved a little to obscure the initial “s”, and thusspell “Hades”.

The theology of this seemed a little confused, reflected Dirk,but what was one tiny extra droplet of misinformation in such araging torrent?

Lucifer then mugged at the camera again and said, “I couldreally fall for this stuff… ” and just in case the viewer had beenrendered completely insensate by all these goings-on, theopening shot of Lucifer being hurled from heaven was brieflyreplayed in order to emphasise the word “fall”.

The boy’s attention was entirely captivated by this.

Dirk squatted down in between the boy and the screen.

“Listen to me,” he began.

The boy craned his neck round to look past Dirk at the screen.He had to redistribute his limbs in the chair in order to be able todo this and continue to fork Pot Noodle into himself.

“Listen,” insisted Dirk again.

Dirk felt he was beginning to be in serious danger of losingthe upper hand in the situation. It wasn’t merely that the boy’sattention was on the television, it was that nothing else seemedto have any meaning or independent existence for him at all.Dirk was merely a featureless object in the way of the television.The boy seemed to bear him no malice, he merely wished to seepast him.

“Look, can we turn this off for a moment?” Dirk said, and hetried not to make it sound testy.

The boy did not respond. Maybe there was a slight stiffeningof the shoulders, maybe it was a shrug. Dirk turned around andwas at a loss to find which button to push to turn the televisionoff. The whoIe control pane seemed to be dedicated to thesingle

purpose of keeping itself turned on - there was no singlebutton marked “on” or “off”. Eventually Dirk simplydisconnected the set from the power socket on the wall andturned back to the boy, who broke his nose.

Dirk felt his septum crunching from the terrific impact of theboy’s forehead as they both toppled heavily backwards againstthe set, but the noise of the bone breaking, and the noise of hisown cry of pain as it broke was completely obliterated by thehowling screams of rage that erupted from the boy’s throat. Dirkflailed helplessly to try and protect himself from the fury of theonslaught, but the boy was on top with his elbow in Dirk’s eye,his knees pounding first on Dirk’s ribcage, then his jaw and thenon Dirk’s already traumatised nose, as he scrambled over him toreconnect the power to the television. He then settled backcomfortably into the armchair and watched with a moody andunsettled eye as the picture reassembled itself.

“You could at least have waited for the news,” he said in adull voice.

Dirk gaped at him. He sat huddled on the floor, coddling hisbleeding nose in his hands, and gaped at the monstrouslydisinterested creature.

“Whhfff. . . fffmmm. . . nnggh ! ” he protested, and then gave upfor the time being, while he probed his nose for the damage.

There was definitely a wobbly bit that clicked nastily betweenhis fingers, and the whole thing seemed suddenly to be ahorribly unfamiliar shape. He fished a handkerchief out of hispocket and held it up to his face. Blood spread easily through it.He staggered to his feet, brushed aside non-existent offers ofhelp, stomped out of the room and into the tiny bathroom. There,he yanked the hosepipe angrily off the tap, found a towel,soaked it in cold water and held it to his face for a minute or twountil the flow of blood gradually slowed to a trickle andstopped. He stared at himself in the mirror. His nose was quitedefinitely leaning at a slightly rakish angle. He tried bravely toshift it, but not bravely enough. It hurt abominably, so hecontented himself with dabbing at it a little more with the wettowel and swearing quietly.

Then he stood there for a second or two longer, leaningagainst the basin, breathing heavily, and practising saying “Allright!” fiercely into the mirror. It came out as “Aww-bwigh!”and lacked any real authority. When he felt sufficiently braced,or at least as braced as he was likely to feel in the immediatefuture, he turned and stalked grimly back into the den of thebeast.

The beast was sitting quietly absorbing news of some of

theexciting and stimulating game shows that the evening held instore for the determined viewer, and did not look up as Dirkre-entered.

Dirk walked briskly over to the window and drew the curtainssharply back, half hoping that the beast might shrivel upshrieking if exposed to daylight, but other than wrinkling up itsnose, it did not react. A dark shadow flapped briefly across thewindow, but the angle was such that Dirk could not see whatcaused it.

He turned and faced the boy-beast. The midday news bulletinwas starting on television, and the boy seemed somehow a littlemore open, a little more receptive to the world outside theflickering coloured rectangle. He glanced up at Dirk with a sour,tired look.

"Whaddayawananyway?" he said.

"I ted you whad I wad," said Dirk, fiercely but hopelessly, "Iwad…hag od a bobed…I gnow thad faith!"

Dirk's attention had switched suddenly to the televisionscreen, where a rather more up-to-date photograph of themissing airline check-in girl was being shown.

"Whadayadoingere?" said the boy.

"Jjchhhhh!" said Dirk, and perched himself down on the armof the chair, peering intently at the face on the screen. It hadbeen taken about a year ago, before the girl had learnt aboutcorporate lipgloss. She had frizzy hair and a frumpy, put-uponlook.

"Whoareyou? Wassgoinon?" insisted the boy.

"Loog, chuddub," snapped Dirk, "I'b tryid to wodge dthith!"

The newscaster said that the police professed themselves tobe mystified by the fact that there was no trace of Janice Smithat the scene of the incident. They explained that there was alimit to the number of times they could search the samebuildings, and appealed for anyone who might have a clue as toher whereabouts to come forward.

"Thadth by segradry! Thadth Mith Pearth!" exclaimed Dirkin astonishment.

The boy was not interested in Dirk's ex-secnetary, and gaveup trying to atttact Dirk's attention. He wriggled out of thesleeping-bag and sloped off to the bathroom.

Dirk sat staring at the television, bewildered that he hadn'trealised before who the missing girl was. Still, there was noreason why he should have done, he realiced. Marriage hadchanged her name, and this was the first time they had shown aphotograph that actually identified her. So far he had taken

noreal interest in the strange incident at the airport, but now itdemanded his attention.

The explosion was now officially designated an “Act ofGod”.

But, thought Dirk, what god? And why?

What god would be hanging around Terminal Two offieathrow Aitport trying to catch the 15.37 flight to Oslo?

After the miserable lassitude of the last few weeks, hesuddenly had a great deal that required his immediate attention.He frowned in deep thought for a few moments, and hardlynoticed when the beast-boy snuck back in and snuggled backinto his sleeping-bag just in time for the advertisements to start.The first one showed how a perfectly ordinary stock cube couldform the natural focus of a normal, happy family life.

Dirk leapt to his feet, but even as he was about to startquestioning the boy again his heart sank as he looked at him.The beast was far away, sunk back in his dark, flickering lair,and Dirk did not feel inclined to disturb him again at themoment.

He contented himself with barking at the unresponding childthat he would be back, and bustled heavily down the stairs, hisbig leather coat flapping madly behind him.

In the hallway he encountered the loathed Gilks once more.

“What happened to you?” said the policeman sharply,catching sight of Dirk’s bruised and bulging nose.

“Ondly whad you dold me,” said Dirk, innocently. “I beadbythelf ub.”

Gilks demanded to know what he had been doing, and Dirkgenerously explained that there was a witness upstairs withsome interesting information to impart. He suggested that Gilksgo and have a word with him, but that it would be best if heturned off the television first.

Gilks nodded curtly. He started to go up the stairs, but Dirkstopped him.

“Doedth eddydthig dthrike you adth dthraydge aboud dthidthhoudth?” he said.

“What did you say?” said Gilks in irritation.

“Subbthig dthraydge,” said Dirk.

“Something what?”

“Dthraydge!” insisted Dirk.

“Strange?”

“Dthadth right, dthraydge.”

Gilks shrugged. “Like what?” he said.

“Id dtheemdth to be cobbleedly dthouledth.”

“Completely what?”

“Dthouledth!” he tried again. “Thoul-leth! I dthigg dthadthdverry idderedthigg!”

With that he doffed his hat politely, and swept on out of thehouse and up the street, where an eagle swooped out of the skyat him and came within a whisker of causing him to fall under a73 bus on its way south.For the next twenty minutes, hideous yells and screamsemanated from the top floor of the house in Lupton Road, andcaused much tension among the neighbours. The ambulancetook away the upper and lower remains of Mr Anstey and also apoliceman with a bleeding face. For a short while after this,there was quietness.

Then another police car drew up outside the house. A lot o”Bob’s here” type of remarks floated from the house, as anextremely large and burly policeman heaved himself out of thecar and bustled up the steps. A few minutes and a great deal ofscreaming and yelling later he re-emerged also clutching hisface, and drove off in deep dudgeon, squealing his tyres in aviolent and unnecessary manner.

Twenty minutes later a van arrived from which emergedanother policeman carrying a tiny pocket television set. Heentered the house, and re-emerged a short while later leading adocile thirteen-year-old boy, who was content with his new toy.

Once all policemen had departed, save for the single squadcar which remained parked outside to keep watch on the house,a large, hairy, green-eyed figure emerged from its hiding placebehind one of the molecules in the large basement room.

It propped its scythe against one of the hi-fi speakers, dippeda long, gnarled finger in the almost congealed pool of blood thathad collected on the deck of the turntable, smeared the fingeracross the bottom of a sheet of thick, yellowing paper, and thendisappeared off into a dark and hidden otherworld whistling astrange and vicious tune and returning only briefly to collect itsscythe.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 7

A little earlier in the morning, at a comfortable distance from allthese events, set at a comfortable distance from a well-proponioned window through which cool mid-morning lightwas streaming, lay an elderly one-eyed man in a white bed. Anewspaper sat like a half-collapsed tent on the floor, where ithad been hurled two minutes before, at shortly aher ten o'clockby the clock on the bedside table.

The room was not large, but was furnished in excessivelybland good taste, as if it were a room in an expensive privatehospital or clinic, which is exactly what it was - the WoodsheadHospital, set in its own small but well-kempt grounds on theoutskirts of a small but well-kempt village in the Cotswolds.

The man was awake but not glad to be.

His skin was very delicately old, like finely stretched,translucent parchment, delicately freckled. His exquisitely frailhands lay slightly curled on the pure white linen sheets andquivered very faintly.

His name was variously given as Mr Odwin, or Wodin, orOdin. He was - is - a god, and furthermore he was that leastgood of all gods to be alongside, a cross god. His one eyeglinted.

He was cross because of what he had been reading in thenewspapers, which was that another god had been cutting looseand making a nuisance of himself. It didn't say that in thepapers, of course. It didn't say, "God cuts loose, makes nuisanceof himself in airport," it merely described the resultingdevastation and was at a loss to draw any meaningfulconclusions from it.

The story had been deeply unsatisfactory in all sorts of ways,on account of its perplexing inconclusiveness, its going-nowhereness and the irritating (from the newspapers' point ofview) lack of any good solid carriage. There was of course amystery attached to the lack of carnage, but a newspaperpreferred a good whack of carnage to a mere mystery any day ofthe week.

Odin, however, had no such difficulty in knowing what wasgoing on. The accounts had "Thor" written all over them inletters much too big for anyone other than another god to see.He had thrown this morning's paper aside in irritation, and wasnow trying to concentrate on his relaxation exercises in order toavoid getting too disturbed about all this. These involvedbreathing in in a certain way and breathing out in a

certain otherway and were good for his blood pressure and so on. It was notas if he was about to die or anything - ha! - but there was nodoubt that at his time of life - ha! - he preferred to take thingseasy and look after himself.

Best of all he liked to sleep.

Sleeping was a very important activity for him. He liked tosleep for longish periods, great swathes of time. Merely sleepingovernight was not taking the business seriously. He enjoyed agood night's sleep and wouldn't miss one for the world, but hedidn't regard it as anything even half approaching enough. Heliked to be asleep by half past eleven in the morning if possible,and if that could come directly after a nice leisurely lie-in thenso much the better. A little light breakfast and a quick trip to thebathroom while fresh linen was applied to his bed is really allthe astivity he liked to undertake, and he took care that it didn'tjangle the sleepiness out of him and thus disturb his afternoon ofnapping. Sometimes he was able to spend an entire week asleep,and this he regarded as a good snooze. He had also slept throughthe whole of 1986 and hadn't missed it.

But he knew to his deep disgruntlement that he would shortlyhave to arise and undertake a sacred and irritating trust. Sacred,because it was godlike, or at least involved gods, and irritatingbecause of the particular god that it involved.

Sneakily, he twitched the curtains at a distance, using nothingbut his divine will. He sighed heavily. He needed to think and,what was more, it was time for his morning visit to thebathroom.

He rang for the orderly.

The orderly arrived promptly in his well-pressed loose greentunic, good-morninged cheerfully, and bustled around locatingbedroom slippers and dressing-gown. He helped Odin out ofbed, which was a little like rolling a stuffed crow out of a box,and escorted him slowly to the bathroom. Odin walked stiffly,like a head hung between two heavy stilts draped in stripedViyella and white towelling. The orderly knew Odin as MrOdwin, and didn't realise that he was a god, which wassomething that Odin tended to keep quiet about, and wished thatThor would too.

Thor was the God of Thunder and, frankly, acted like it. Itwas inappropriate. He seemed unwilling, or unable, or maybejust too stupid to understand or accept…Odin stopped himself.He sensed that he was beginning mentally to rant. He wouldhave to consider calmly what next to do about Thor, and he wason his way to the right place for a good think.

As soon as Odin had completed his stately hobble to thebathroom door, two nurses hurried in and stripped and remadethe bed with immense precision, patting down the fresh linen,pulling it taut, turning it and tucking it. One of the nurses,clearly the senior, was plump and matronly, the other younger,darker and more generally bird-like. The newspaper waswhisked off the tloor and neatly refolded, the floor was brisklyHoovered, the curtains hooked back, the flowers and theuntouched fruit replaced with fresh flowers and fresh fruit thatwould, like every piece of fruit before them, remain untouched.

When after a little while the old god's morning ablutions hadbeen completed and the bathroom door reopened, the room hadbeen transformed. The actual differences were tiny, of course,but the effect was of a subtle but magical transformation intosomething cool and fresh. Odin nodded in quiet satisfaction tosee it. He made a little show of inspecting the bed, like amonarch inspecting a line of soldiers.

"Is it well tucked?" he asked in his old and whispery voice.

"It is very well tucked, Mr Odwin," said the senior nurse withan obsequious beam.

"Is it neatly turned?" It clearly was. This was merely a ritual.

"Turned very neatly indeed, Mr Odwin," said the nurse, "Isupervised the turning down of the sheets myself."

"I'm glad of that, Sister Bailey, very glad," said Odin. "Youhave a fine eye for a trimly turned fold. It alarms me to knowwhat I shall do without you."

"Well, I'm not about to go anywhere, Mr Odwin," said SisterBailey, oozing happy reassurance.

"But you won't last for ever, Sister Bailey," said Odin. It wasa remark that puzzled Sister Bailey on the times she had heard it,because of its apparent extreme callousness.

"Sure, and none of us lasts for over, Mr Odwin," she saidgently as she and the other nurse between them managed thedifficult task of lifting Odin back into hed while keeping hisdignity intact.

"You're Irish aren't you, Sister Bailey?" he asked, once hewas properly settled.

"I am indeed so, Mr Odwin."

"Knew an Irishman once. Finn something. Told me a lot ofstuff I didn't need to know. Never told me about the linen. Stillknow now."

He nodded curtly at this memory and lowered his head stifflyback on to the firmly plumped up pillows and ran the back of hisfinely freckled hand over the folded-back linen sheet.

Quitesimply he was in love with linen. Clean, lightly starched, whiteIrish linen, pressed, folded, tucked - the words themselves werealmost a litany of desire for him. In centuries nothing hadobsessed him or moved him so much as linen now did. He couldnot for the life of him understand how he could ever have caredfor anything else.

Linen.

And sleep. Sleep and linen. Sleep in linen. Sleep.

Sister Bailey regarded him with a sort of proprietaryfondness. She did not know that he was a god as such, in factshe thought he was probably an old film producer or Nazi warcriminal. Certainly he had an accent she couldn't quite placeand his careless civility, his natural selfishness and his obsessionwith personal hygiene spoke of a past that was rich with horrors.

If she could have been transported to where she might see hersecretive patient enthroned, warrior father of the wamor Gods ofAsgard, she would not have been surprised. That is not quitetrue, in fact. She would have been startled quite out of her wits.But she would at least have recognised that it was consistentwith the qualities she perceived in him, once she had recoveredfrom the shock of discovering that virtually everything thehuman race had ever chosen to believe in was true. Or that itcontinued to be true long after the human race particularlyneeded it to be true any more.

Odin dismissed his medical attendants with a gesture, havingfirst asked for his personal assistant to be found and sent to himonce more.

This caused Sister Bailey to tighten her lips just a very little.She did not like Mr Odwin's personal assistant, generalfactotum, manservant, call him what you will. His eyes weremalevolent, he made her jump, and she strongly suspected himof making unspeakabie suggestions to her nurses during their teabreaks.

He had what Sister Bailey supposed was what people meantby an olive complexion, in that it was extraordinarily close tobeing green. Sister Bailey was convinced that it was not right atall.

She was of course the last person to judge somebody by thecolour of their skin - or if not absolutely the last, she had at leastdone it as recently as yesterday afternoon when an Africandiplomat had been brought in to have some gallstones removedand she had conceived an instant resentment of him. She didn'tlike him. She couldn't say exactly what it was she didn't likeabout him, because she was a nurse, not a taxi-driver, and shewouldn't let her personal feelings show for an instant. She

wasmuch too professional, much too good at her job, and treatedeveryone with a more or less equal efficient and cheerfulcourtesy, even, she thought - and a profound iciness settled onher at this point - even Mr Rag.

"Mr Rag" was the name of Mr Odwin's personal assistant.There was nothing she could do about it. It was not her place tocriticise Mr Odwin's personal arrangements. But if it had beenher business, which it wasn't, then she would greatly havepreferred it, and not just for herself, but for Mr Odwin's ownwell-being as well, which was the important thing, if he couldhave employed someone who didn't give her the absoluteheebie-jeebies, that was all.

She thought no more about it, merely went to look for him.She had been relieved to discover when she came on duty thismorning that Mr Rag had left the premises the previous night,but had then, with a keen sense of disappointment, spotted himreturning about an hour or so ago.

She found him exactly where he was not supposed to be. Hewas squatting on one of the seats in the visitors' waiting-roomwearing what looked horribly like a soiled and discardeddoctor's gown that was much too big for him. Not only that, buthe was playing a thinly unmusical tune on a sort of pipe that hehad obviously carved out of a large disposable hypodermicsyringe which he absolutely should not have had.

He glanced up at her with his quick, dancing eyes, grinnedand continued to tootle and squeak, only significantly louder.

Sister Bailey ran through in her mind all the things that it wascompletely pointless to say about either the roat or the syringe,or about him being in the visitors' room frightening, orpreparing to frighten, the visitors. She knew she wouldn't beable to stand the air of injured innocence with which he wouldreply, or the preposterous absurdity of his answers. Her onlycourse was simply to let it pass and just get him away from theroom and out of the way as quickly as possible.

"Mr Odwin would like to see you," she said. She tried to jamsome of her normal lilting quality into her voice, but it justwouldn't go. She wished his eyes would stop dancing like that.Apart from finding it highly disturbing from both a medical andaesthetic point of view she also could not help but be piqued bythe impression it conveyed that there were at least thirty-seventhings in the room more interesting than her.

He gazed at her in this disconcerting manner for a fewseconds then, muttering that there was no peace for the wicked,not even the extremely wicked, he pushed past Sister Bailey andskedaddled

up the corridor to receive instructions from his lordand master, quickly, before his lord and master fell asleep.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 8

By the end of the morning Kate had discharged herself fromhospital. There were some initial difficulties involved in thisbecause first the ward sister and then the doctor in charge ofKate's case were adamant that she was in no fit state to leave.She had only just emerged from a minor coma and she neededcare, she needed -

"Pizza - " insisted Kate.

- rest, she needed -

"- my own home, and fresh air. The air in here is horrible. Itsmells like a vacuum cleaner's armpit."

- further medication, and should definitely remain underobservation for another day or so until they were satisfied thatshe had made a full recovery.

At least, they were fairly adamant. During the course of themorning Kate demanded and got a telephone and started tryingto order pizza to be delivered to her ward. She phoned around allof the least co-operative pizza restaurants she knew in London,harangued them, then made some noisily unsuccessful attemptsto muster a motorbike to roam around the West End and try andpick up for her an American Hot with a list of additional peppersand mushrooms and cheeses which the controller of the courierservice refused even to attempt to remember, and after an houror so of this sort of behaviour the objections to Kate dischargingherself from the hospital gradually fell away like petals from anautumn rose.

And so, a little after lunchtime, she was standing on a bleakWest London street feeling weak and shaky but in charge ofherself. She had with her the empty, tattered remains of thegarment bag which she had refused to relinquish, and also asmall scrap of paper in her purse, which had a single namescribbled on it.

She hailed a taxi and sat in the back with her eyes closedmost of the way back to her home in Primrose Hill. She climbedup the stairs and let herself into her top-tloor flat. There were tenmessages on her answering machine, which she simply erasedwithout listening to.

She threw open the window in her bedroom and for a momentor two leaned out of it at the rather dangerous and awkwardangle which allowed her to see a patch of the park. It was asmall comer patch, with just a couple of plane trees standing init. The backs of some of the intervening houses framed it,

orrather, just failed totally to obscure it, and made it very personaland private to Kate in a way which a vast, sweeping vista wouldnot have been.

On one occasion she had gone to this corner of the park andwalked around the invisible perimeter that marked out the limitsof what she could see, and had come very close to feeling thatthis was her own domain. She had even patted the plane trees ina proprietorial sort of way, and had then sat beneath themwatching the sun going down over London - over its badlyspoiled skyline and its non-delivering pizza restaurants - andhad come away with a profound sense of something or other,though she wasn't quite certain what. Still, she had told herself,these days she should feel grateful for a profound sense ofanything at all, however unspecific.

She hauled herself in from the window, left it wide open inspite of the chill of the outside air, padded through into the smallbathroom and ran the bath. It was a bath of the sprawlingEdwardian type which took up a wonderfully disproportionateamount of the space available, and encompassed most of the restof the room with cream-painted pipes. The taps seethed. As soonas the room was sufficiently full of steam to be warm, Kateundressed and then went and opened the large bathroomcupboard.

She felt faintly embarrassed by the sheer profusion of thingsshe had for putting in baths, but she was for some reasonincapable of passing any chemist or herb shop without going into be seduced by some glass-stoppered bottle of something blueor green or orange and oily that was supposed to restore thenatural balance of some vague substance she didn't even knowshe was supposed to have in her pores.

She paused, trying to choose.

Something pink? Something with extra Vitamin B? VitaminB12? B13? Just the number of things with different types ofVitamin B in them was an embarrassment of choice in itself.There were powders as well as oils, tubes of gel, even packets ofsome kind of pungent smelling seed that was meant to be goodfor some obscure part of you in some arcane way.

How about some of the green crystals? One day, she had toldherself in the past, she would not even bother trying to choose,but would simply put a bit of everything in. When she really feltin need of it. She rather thought that today was the day, and witha sudden reviving rush of pleasure she set about puaing a dropor two of everything in the cupboard into the seething bath untilit was confused with mingling, muddying colours and

vergingon the glutinous to touch.

She turned off the taps, went to her handbag for a moment,then returned and lowered herself into the bath, where she laywith her eyes closed, breathing slowly for fully three minutesbefore at last turning her attention to the scrap of paper she hadbrought with her from the hospital.

It had one word on it, and it was a word she had dragged outof an oddly reluctant young nurse who had taken hertemperature that morning.

Kate had questioned her about the big man. The big manwhom she had encountered at the airport, whose body she hadseen in a nearby side ward in the early hours of the night.

“Oh no,” the nurse had said, “he wasn’t dead. He was just insome sort of coma.”

Could she see him? Kate had asked. What was his name?

She had tried to ask idly, in passing as it were, which was adifficult trick to pull off with a thermometer in her mouth, andshe wasn’t at all certain she had succeeded. The nurse had saidthat she couldn’t really say, she wasn’t really meant to talk aboutother patients. And anyway, the man wasn’t there any more, hehad been taken somewhere else. They had sent an ambulance tocollect him and take him somewhere else.

This had taken Kate considerably by surprise.

Where had they taken him? What was this special place? Butthe nurse had been unwilling to say anything much more, and asecond or two later had been summoned away by the Sister. Theonly word the nurse had said was the one that Kate had thenscribbled down on the piece of paper she was now looking at.

The word was “Woodshead”.

Now that she was more relaxed she had a feeling that thename was familiar to her in some way, though she could notremember where she had heard it.

The instant she remembered, she could not stay in the bathany longer, but got out and made straight for the telephone,pausing only briefly to shower all the gunk off her.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 9

The big man awoke and tried to look up, but could hardly raisehis head. He tried to sit up but couldn't do that either. He felt asif he'd been stuck to the floor with superglue and after a fewseconds he discovered the most astounding reason for this.

He jerked his head up violently, yanking out great tufts ofyellow hair which stayed painfully stuck to the floor, and lookedaround him. He was in what appeared to be a derelictwarehouse, probably an upper floor judging by the wintry sky hecould see creeping past the grimy, shattered windows.

The ceilings were high and hung with cobwebs built byspiders who did not seem to mind that most of what they caughtwas crumbling plaster and dust. They were supported by pillarsmade from upright steel joists on which the dirty old cream paintwas bubbled and flaking, and these in turn stood on a floor ofbattered old oak on to which he had clearly been glued.Extending out for a foot or two in a rough oval all around hisnaked body the floor glistened darkly and dully. Thin,nostril-cleaning fumes rose from it. He could not believe it. Heroared with rage, tried to wriggle and shake himself butsucceeded only in tugging painfully at his skin where it wasstuck fast to the oak planks.

This had to be the old man's doing.

He threw his head back hard against the floor in a blow thatcracked the boards and made his ears sing. He roared again andtook some furious satisfaction in making as much hopeless,stupid noise as he could. He roared until the steel pillars rangand the cracked remains of the windows shattered into finershards. Then, as he threw his head angrily from one side to theother he caught sight of his sledge-hammer leaning against thewall a few feet from him, heaved it up into the air with a word,and sent it hurtling round the great space, beating and clangingon every pillar until the whole building reverberated like a madgong.

Another word and the hammer flew back at him, missed hishead by a hand's-width and punched straight down through thefloor, shattering the wood and the plaster below.

In the darker space beneath him the hammer spun, and swunground in a slow heavy parabola as bits of plaster fell about it andrattled on the concrete floor below. Then it gathered a violentmomentum and hurtled back up through the ceiling, smackingup a stack of startled splinters as it punched through another oakfloorboard a hand's-width from the soles of the big

man’s feet.

It soared up into the air, hung there for a moment as if itsweight had suddenly vanished, then, deftly flicking its shorthandle up above its head, it drove hard back down through thetloor again - then up again, then down again, punching holes ina splintered ring around its master until, with a long heavygroan, the whole oval section of punctured floor gave way andplunged, twisting, through the air. It shattered itself against thefloor below amidst a rain of plaster debris, from which the figureof the big man then emerged, staggering, flapping at the dustyair and coughing. His back, his arms and his legs were stillcovered with great splintered hunks of oak flooring, but at leasthe was able to move. He leant the flat of his hands against thewall and violently coughed some of the dast from his lungs.

As he turned back, his hammer danced out of the air towardshim, then suddenly evaded his grasp and skidded joyfully offacross the floor striking sparks from the concrete with its greathead, flipped up and parked itself against a nearby pillar at ajaunty angle.

In front of him the shape of a large Coca-Cola vendingmachine loomed through the settling cloud of dust. He regardedit with the gravest suspicion and worry. It stood there with a sortof glazed, blank look to it, and had a note from his father stuckon the front panel saying whatever he was doing, stop it. It wassigned “You-know-who”, but this had been crossed out and firstthe word “Odin” and then in larger letters “Your Father” hadbeen substituted. Odin never ceased to make absolutely clear hisview of his son’s intellectual accomplishments. The big mantore the note off and stared at it in anger. A postscript addeddarkly “Remember Wales. You don’t want to go through all thatagain.” He screwed the note up and hurled it out of the nearestwindow, where the wind whipped it up and away. For a momenthe thought he heard an odd squeaking noise, but it was probablyjust the blustering of the wind as it whistled between the nearbyderelict buildings.

He turned and walked to the window and stared out of it in abelligerent sulk. Glued to the floor. At his age. What the devilwas that supposed to mean? “Keep your head down,” was whathe guessed. “If you don’t keep it down, I’ll have to keep it downfor you.” That was what it meant. “Stick to the ground.”

He remembered now the old man saying exactly that to himat the time of all the unpleasantness with the Phantom fighter jet.”Why can’t you just stick to the ground?” he had said. He couldimagine the old man in his soft-headed benign malice

thinking itvery funny to make the lesson so literal.

Rage began to rumble menacingly inside him but he pushed itdown hard. Very worrying things had recently begun happeningwhen he got angry and he had a bad feeling, looking back at theCoca-Cola vending machine, that another of those veryworrying things must have just happened. He stared at it andfretted.

He felt ill.

He had felt ill a lot of late, and he found it impossible todischarge what were left of his godly duties when he felt he wassuffering from a sort of continual low-grade flu. He experiencedheadaches, dizzy spells, guilt and all the sorts of ailments thatwere featured so often in television advertisements. He evensuffered terrifying blackouts whenever the great rage grippedhim.

He always used to have such a wonderful time getting angry.Great gusts of marvellous anger would hurl him through life. Hefelt huge. He felt flooded with power and light and energy. Hehad always been provided with such wonderful things to getangry about - immense acts of provocation or betrayal, peoplehiding the AtIantic ocean in his helmet, dropping continents onhim or getting drunk and pretending to be trees. Stuff you couldreally work up a rage about and hit things. In short he had feltgood about being a Thunder God. Now suddeniy it washeadaches, nervous tension, nameless anxieties and guilt. Thesewere new experiences for a god, and not pleasant ones.

“You look ridiculous!”

The voice screeched out and affected Thor like fingernailsscratched across a blackboard lodged in the back of his brain. Itwas a mean voice, a spiteful, jeering voice, a cheap white nylonshirt of a voice, a shiny-trousered pencil moustache of a voice, avoice, in short, which Thor did not like. He reacted very badly toit at the best of times, and was particularly provoked to have tohear it while standing naked in the middle of a decrepitwarehouse with large sections of an oak floor still stuck to hisback.

He spun round angrily. He wanted to be able to turn roundcalmly and with crushing dignity, but no such strategy everworked with this creature, and since he, Thor, would only endup feeling humiliated and ridiculous whatever postune headopted, he might as well go with one he felt comfortable with.

“Toe Rag!” he roared, yanked his hammer spinning into theair and hurled it with immense, stunning force at the smallcreature who was squatting complacently in the shadows on topof a small

heap of rubble, leaning forward a little.

Toe Rag caught the hammer and placed it neatly on top of thepile of Thor's clothes that lay next to him. He grinned, andallowed a stray shaft of sunlight to glitter on one of his teeth.These things don't happen by accident. Toe Rag had spent sometime while Thor was unconscious working out how long itwould take him to recover, then industriously moving the pile ofrubble to exactly this spot, checking the height and thencalculating the exact angle at which to lean. As a provocateur heregarded himself as a professional.

"Did you do this to me?" roared Thor. "Did you - "

Thor searched for any way of saying "glue me to the floor"that didn't sound like "glue me to floor", but eventually thepause got too long and he had to give up.

"- glue me to the floor?" he demanded at last. He wished hehadn't asked such a stupid question.

"Don't even answer that!" he added angrily and wished hehadn't said that either. He stamped his foot and shook thefoundations of the building a little just to make the point. Hewasn't certain what the point was, but he felt that it had to bemade. Some dust settled gently around him.

Toe Rag watched him with his dancing, glittering eyes.

"I merely carry out the instructions given to me by yourfather," he said in a grotesque parody of obsequiousness.

"It seems to me," said Thor, "that the instructions my fatherhas been giving since you entered his service have been veryodd. I think you have some kind of evil grip on him. I don'tknow what kind of evil grip it is, but it's definitely a grip, andit's definitely…" synonyms failed him "…evil," he concluded.

Toe Rag reacted like an iguana to whom someone had justcomplained about the wine.

"Me?" he protested. "How can I possibly have a grip on yourfather? Odin is the greatest of the Gods of Asgard, and I am hisdevoted servant in all things. Odin says, `Do this,' and I do it.Odin says, `Go there,' and I go there. Odin says, `Go and get mybig stupid son out of hospital before he causes any more trouble,and then, I don't know, glue him to the floor or something,' andI do exactly as he asks. I am merely the most humble offunctionaries. However small or menial the task, Odin's biddingis what I am there to perform."

Thor was not sufficiently subtle a student of human nature or,for that matter, divine or goblin nature, to be able to argue thatthis was in fact a very powerful grip to hold over anybody,particularly a fallible and pampered old god. He just

knew that itwas all wrong.

“Well then,” he shouted, “take this message back to myfather, Odin. Tell him that I, Thor, the God of Thunder, demandto meet him. And not in his damned hospital either! I’m notgoing to hang about reading magazines and looking at fruitwhile he has his bed changed! Tell him that Thor, the God ofThunder, will meet Odin, the Father of the Gods of Asgard, to-night, at the Challenging Hour in the Halls of Asgard!”

“Again?” said Toe Rag, with a sly glance sideways at theCoca-Cola vending machine.

“Er, yes,” said Thor. “Yes!” he repeated in a rage. “Again!”

Toe Rag made a tiny sigh, such as one who felt resigned tocarrying out the bidding of a temperamental simpleton mightmake, and said, “Well, I’ll tell him. I don’t suppose he will bebest pleased.”

“It is no matter of yours whether he is pleased or not!”shouted Thor, disturbing the foundations of the building oncemore. “This is between my father and myself! You may thinkyourself very clever, Toe Rag, and you may think that I amnot - “

Toe Rag arched an eyebrow. He had prepared for thismoment. He stayed silent and merely let the stray beatn ofsunlight glint on his dancing eyes. It was a silence of the mostprofound eloquence.

“I may not know what you’to up to, Toe Rag, I may not knowa lot of things, but I do know one thing. I know that I am Thor,the God of Thunder, and that I will not be made a fool of by agoblin!”

“Well,” said Toe Rag with a light grin, “when you know twothings I expect you’ll be twice as clever. Remember to put yourclothes on before you go out.” He gestured casually at the pilebeside him and departed.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 10

The trouble with the sort of shop that sells things likemagnifying glasses and penknives is that they tend also to sellall kinds of other fascinating things, like the quite extraordinarydevice with which Dirk eventually emerged after having beenhopelessly unable to decide between the knife with the built-inPhilips screwdriver, toothpick and ball-point pen and the onewith the 13-tooth gristle saw and the tig-welded rivets.

The magnifying glasses had held him in thrall for a shortwhile, particularly the 25-diopter, high-index, vacuum-deposited, gold-coated glass model with the integral handle andmount and the notchless seal glazing, but then Dirk hadhappened to catch sight of a small electronic I Ching calculatorand he was lost.

He had never before even guessed at the existence of such athing. And to be able to move from total ignorance of somethingto total desire for it, and then actually to own the thing all withinthe space of about forty seconds was, for Dirk, something of anepiphany.

The electronic I Ching calculator was badly made. It hadprobably been manufactured in whichever of the South-EastAsian countries was busy tooling up to do to South Korea whatSouth Korea was busy doing to Japan. GIue technology hadobviously not progressed in that country to the point wherethings could be successfully held together with it. Already theback had half fallen off and needed to be stuck back on withSellotape.

It was much like an ordinary pocket calculator, except thatthe LCD screen was a little larger than usual, in order toaccommodate the abridged judgements of King Wen on each ofthe sixty-four hexagrams, and also the commentaries of his son,the Duke of Chou, on each of the lines of each hexagram. Thesewere unusual texts to see marching across the display of apocket calculator, particularly as they had been translated fromthe Chinese via the Japanese and seemed to have enjoyed manyadventures on the way.

The device also functioned as an ordinary calculator, but onlyto a limited degree. It could handle any calculation whichreturned an answer of anything up to “4″.

“1 + 1″ it could manage (”2″), and “1 + 2″ (”3″) and “2 + 2″(”4″) or “tan 74″ (”3.4874145″), but anything above “4″ itrepresented merely as “A Suffusion of Yellow”. Dirk was notcertain if this was a programming error or an insight beyond

hisability to fathom, but he was crazy about it anyway, enough tohand over ?20 of ready cash for the thing.

“Thank you, sir,” said the proprietor. “It’s a nice piece that. Ithink you’ll be happy with it.”

“I ab,” said Dirk.

“Glad to hear it, sir,” replied the proprietor. “Do you knowyou’ve broken your nose?”

Dirk looked up from fawning on his new possession.

“Yedth,” he said testily, “obf courth I dknow.”

The man nodded, satisfied.

“Just that a lot of my customers wouldn’t always know abouta thing like that,” he explained.

Dirk thanked him tersely and humed out with his purchase.A few minutes later he took up residence at the small comertable of an Islington caf, ordered a small but incredibly strongcup of coffee; and attempted to take stock of his day. Amoment’s reflection told him that he was almost certainly goingto need a small but incredibly strong beer as well, and heattempted to add this to his order.

“A wha?” said the waiter. His hair was very black and filledwith brilliantine. He was tall, incredibly fit and too cool to listento customers or say consonants.

Dirk repeated his order, but what with having the caf’smusic system, a broken nose, and the waiter’s insuperable coolto contend with, he eventually found it simpler to write out theorder on a napkin with a stub of pencil. The waiter peered at it inan offended manner, and left.

Dirk exchanged a friendly nod with the girl sitting halfreading a book at the next table, who had watched this exchangewith sympathy. Then he set about laying out his morning’sacquisitions on the table in front of him - the newspaper, theelectronic I Ching calculator and the envelope which he hadretrieved from behind the gold disc on Geoffrey Anstey’sbathroom wall. He then spent a minute or two dabbing at hisnose with a handkerchief, and prodding it tenderly to see howmuch it hurt, which turned out to be quite a lot. He sighed andstuffed the handkerchief back in his pocket.

A few seconds later the waiter returned bearing a herbomelette and a single breadstick. Dirk explained that this wasn’twhat he had ordered. The waiter shrugged and said that it wasn’this fault.

Dirk had no idea what to say to this, and said so. He was stillhaving a great deal of difficulty speaking. The waiter asked Dirkif he knew that he had broken his nose and Dirk said that

yedth,dthagg you berry budge, he did. The waiter said that his friendNeil had once broken his nose and Dirk said that he hobed ithurd like hell, which seemed to draw the conversation to a close.The waiter took the omelette and left, vowing never to return.

When the girl sitting at the next table looked away for amoment, Dirk leaned over and took her coffee. He knew that hewas perfectly safe doing this because she would simply not beable to believe that this had happened. He sat sipping at thelukewarm cup and casting his mind back over the day.

He knew that before consulting the I Ching, even anelectronic one, he should try and compose his thoughts andallow them to settle calmly.

This was a tough one.

However much he tried to clear his mind and think in a calmand collected way, he was unable to stop Geoffrey Anstey'shead revolving incessantly in his mind. It revolveddisapprovingly, as if pointing an accusing finger at Dirk. Thefact that it did not have an accusing finger with which to pointonly served to drive the point it was trying to make home all theharder.

Dirk screwed up his eyes and attempted to concentrateinstead on the problem of the mysteriously vanished MissPearce, but was unable to get much of a grip on it. When she hadused to work for him she would often disappear mysteriously fortwo or three days at a time, but the papers didn't make any kindof fuss about it then. Admittedly, there weren't things explodingaround her at the time, at least, not that he was aware of. Shehad never mentioned anything exploding particularly.

Furthermore, whenever he thought of her face, which he hadlast seen on the television set in Geoffrey Anstey's house, histhoughts tended instantly to sink towards the head which wasbusy revolving thirty-three and a third times a minute threefloors beneath it. This was not conducive to the calm andcontemplative mood he was seeking. Nor was the very loudmusic on the caf's music system.

He sighed, and stai-ed at the electronic I Ching calculator.

If he wanted to get his thoughts into some kind of order thenmaybe chronological order would be as good a one as any. Hedecided to cast his mind back to the beginning of the day, beforeany of these appalling things had happened, or at least, beforethey'd happened to him.

First there had been the fridge.

It seemed to him that by comparison with everything else,

theproblem of what to do about his fridge had now shrunk to fairlymanageable proportions. It still provoked a discemible twinge offear and guilt, but here, he thought, was a problem which hecould face up to with relative calm.

The little book of instructions suggested that he shouldsimply concentrate “soulfully” on the question which was”besieging” him, write it down, ponder on it, enjoy the silence,and then once he had achieved inner harmony and tranquillity heshould push the red button.

There wasn’t a red button, but there was a blue buttonmarked “Red”, and this Dirk took to be the one.

He concentrated for a while on the question, then lookedthrough his pockets for a piece of paper, but was unable to findone. In the end he wrote his question, “Should I buy a newfridge?” on a corner of his napkin. Then he took the view that ifhe was going to wait until he had achieved inner harmony andtranquillity he could be there all night, so he went ahead andpushed the blue button marked “Red” anyway. A symbol flashedup in a corner of the screen, a hexagram which looked like this:

****

3 : CHUN

the I Ching calculator then scrolled this text Across its tinyLCD display:

“THE JUDGEMENT OF KING WEN:

“Chun Signifies Difficulties At Outset, As Of Blade Of
Grass Pushing Up Against Stone. The Time Is Full Of
Irregularities And Obscurities: Superior Man Will Adjust
His Measures As In Sorting The Threads Of The Warp
And Woof. Firm Correctness Will Bring At Last Success.
Early Advances Should Only Be Made With Caution.
There Will Be Advantage In Appointing Feudal Princes.

“LINE 6 CHANGES:

“THE COMMENTARY OF THE DUKE OF CHOU:

“The Horses And The Chariot Obliged To Retreat.
Streams Of Bloody Tears Will Flow.”

Dirk considered this for a few moments, and then decidedthat on balance it appeared to be a vote in favour of getting thenew fridge, which, by a staggering coincidence, was the courseof action which he himself favoured.

There was a pay phone in one of the dark corners wherewaiters slouched moodily at one another. Dirk threaded his waythrough them, wondering whom it was they reminded him of,and eventually deciding that it was the small crowd of

nakedmen standing around behind the Holy Family in Michelangelo'spicture of the same name, for no more apparent reason than thatMichelangelo rather liked them.

He telephoned an acquaintance of his called Nobby Paxton,or so he claimed, who worked the darker side of the domesticappliance supply business. Dirk came straight to the point.

"Dobby, I deed a fridge."

"Dirk, I been saving one against the day you'd ask me."

Dirk found this highly unlikely.

"Only I wand a good fridge you thee, Dobby."

"This is the best, Dirk. Japanese. Microprocessor controlled."

"What would a microprothethor be doing id a fridge,Dobby?"

"Keeping itself cool, Dirk. I'll get the lads to bring it roundright away. I need to get it off the premises pretty sharpish forreasons which I won't trouble you with."

"I apprethiade thid, Dobby," said Dirk. "Froblem id, I'm notat home at preddent."

"Gaining access to houses in the absence of their owner isonly one of the panoply of skills with which my lads are blessed.Let me know if you find anything missing afterwards, by theway."

"I'd be happy to, Dobby. Id fact if your ladth are in a moodfor carting thtuff off I'd be glad if they would thtart with my oldfridge. It badly needth throwing away."

"I shall see that it's done, Dirk. There's usually a skip or twoon your street these days. Now, do you expect to be paying forthis or shall I just get you kneecapped straight off, saveeverybody time and aggravation all round?"

It was never one hundred per cent clear to Dirk exactly whenNobby was joking and he was not keen to put it to the test. Heassured him that he would pay him, as soon as next they met.

"See you very soon then, Dirk," said Nobby. "By the way, doyou know you sound exactly as if someone's broken yournose?"

There was a pause.

"You there, Dirk?" said Nobby.

"Yed," said Dirk. "I wad judd liddening to a reggord."

"Hot Potato!" roared the hi-fi in the caf.

"Don't pick it up. pick it up, pick it up.

"Quick, pass it on, pass it on, pass it on."

"I said, do you know you sound exactly as if someone'sbroken your nose?" repeated Nobby.

Dirk said that he did know this, thanked Nobby for pointingit out, said goodbye, stood thoughtfully for a moment, madeanother quick couple of phone calls, and then threaded his wayback

through the huddle of posing waiters to find the girl whosecoffee he had appropriated sitting at his table.

“Hello,” she said, meaningfully.

Dirk was as gracious as he knew how.

He bowed to her very politely, doffed his hat, since all thisgave him a second or so to recover himself, and requested herpermission to sit down.

“Go ahead,” she said, “it’s your table.” She gesturedmagnanimously.

She was small, her hair was neat and dark, she was in hermid-twenties, and was looking quizzically at the half-empty cupof coffee in the middle of the table.

Dirk sat down opposite her and leant forwardconspiratorially. “I expeg,” he said in a low voice, “you areenquirigg after your coffee.”

“You betcha,” said the girl.

“Id very bad for you, you dow.”

“Is it?”

“Id id. Caffeide. Cholethderog in the milgg.”

“I see, so it was just my health you were thinking of.”

“I was thiggigg of meddy thiggs,” said Dirk airily.

“You saw me sitting at the next table and you thought`There’s a nice-looking girl with her health in ruins. Let me saveher from herself.’”

“In a nudthell.”

“Do you know you’ve broken your nose?”

“Yeth, of courth I do,” said Dirk crossly. “Everybodykeepth - “

“How long ago did you break it?” the girl asked.

“Id wad broked for me,” said Dirk, “aboud tweddy middiddago.”

“I thought so,” said the girl. “Close your eyes for a moment.”

Dirk looked at her suspiciously.

“Why?”

“It’s all right,” she said with a smile, “I’m not going to hurtyou. Now close them.”

With a puzzled frown, Dirk closed his eyes just for amoment. In that moment the girl reached over and gripped himfirmly by the nose, giving it a sharp twist. Dirk nearly explodedwith pain and howled so loudly that he almost attracted theattention of a waiter.

“You widge!” he yelled, staggering wildly back from thetable clutching his face. “You double-dabbed widge!”

“Oh, be quiet and sit down,” she said. “All right, I lied aboutit not going to hurt you, but at least it should be straight now,which

will save you a lot worse later on. You should get straightround to a hospital to have some splints and padding put on. I'ma nurse, I know what I'm doing. Or at least, I think I do. Let'shave a look at you."

Panting and spluttering, Dirk sat down once more, his handscupped round his nose. After a few long seconds he began toprod it tenderly again and then let the girl examine it.

She said, "My name's Sally Mills, by the way. I usually try tointroduce myself properly before physical intimacy takes place,but sometimes," she sighed, "there just isn't time."

Dirk ran his fingers up either side of his nose again.

"I thigg id id trader," Dirk said at last.

"Straighter," Sally said. "Say `straighter' properly. It'll helpyou feel better. "

"Straighter," said Dirk. "Yed. I thee wad you mead."

"What?"

"I see what you mead."

"Good," she said with a sigh of relief, "I'm glad that worked.My horoscope this morning said that virtually everything Idecided today would be wrong."

"Yes, well you don't want to believe all that rubbish," saidDirk sharply.

"I don't," said Satly. ·

"Particularly not The Great Zaganza."

"Oh, you read it too, did you?"

"No. That is, well, not for the same reason."

"My reason was that a patient asked me to read his horoscopeto him this morning just before he died. What was yours?"

"Er, a very complicated one."

"I see," said Sally, sceptically. "What's this?"

"It's a calculator," said Dirk. "Well, look, I mustn't keep you.I am indebted to you, my dear lady, for the tenderness of yourministrations and the loan of your coffee, but lo! the day wearson, and I am sure you have a heavy schedule of grievous bodilyharm to attend to."

"Not at all. I came off night duty at nine o'clock thismorning, and all I have to do all day is keep awake so that I cansleep normally tonight. I have nothing better to do than to sitarnund talking to strangers in cafs. You, on the other hand,should get yourself to a casualty department as soon as possible.As soon as you've paid my bill, in fact."

She leant over to the table she had originally been sitting atand picked up the running-total lying by her plate. She looked

atit, shaking her head disapprovingly.

"Five cups of coffee, I'm afraid. It was a long night on thewards. All sorts of comings and goings in the middle of it. Onepatient in a coma who had to be moved to a private hospital inthe early hours. God knows why it had to be done at that time ofnight. Just creates unnecessary trouble. I wouldn't pay for thesecond croissant if I were you. I ordered it but it never came."

She pushed the bill across to Dirk who picked it up with areluctant sigh.

"Inordinate," he said, "larcenously inordinate. And, in thecircumstances, adding a 15 per cent service charge is tantamountto jeering at you. I bet they won't even bring me a knife."

He turned and tried, without any real hope of success, tosummon any of the gaggle of waiters lounging among the sugarbowls at the back.

Sally Mills took her bill and Dirk's and attempted to addthem up on Dirk's calculator.

"The total seems to come to `A Suffusion of YelIow'," shesaid.

"Thank you, I'll take that," said Dirk turning bask crosslyand relieving her of the electronic I Ching set which he put intohis pocket. He resumed his hapless waving at the tableau ofwaiters.

"What do you want a knife for, anyway?" asked Sally.

"To open this," said Dirk, waggling the large, heavilySellotaped envelope at her.

"I'll get you one," she said. A young man sitting on his ownat another nearby table was looking away at that moment, soSally quickly leaned across and nabbed his knife.

"I am indebted to you," said Dirk and put out his hand to takethe knife from her.

She held it away from him.

"What's in the envelope?" she said.

"You are an extremely inquisitive and presumptuous younglady," exclaimed Dirk.

"And you," said Sally Mills, "are very strange."

"Only," said Dirk, "as strange as I need to be."

"Humph," said Sally. "What's in the envelope?" She stillwouldn't give him the knife.

"The envelope is not yours," proclaimed Dirk, "and itscontents are not your concern."

"It looks very interesting though. What's in it?"

"Well, I won't know till I've opened it!"

She looked at him suspiciously, then snatched the envelopefrom him.

“I insist that you - ” expostulated Dirk, incompletely.

“What’s your name?” demanded Sally.

“My name is Gently. Mr Dirk Gently.”

“And not Geoffrey Anstey, or any of these other names thathave been crossed out?” She frowned, briefly, looking at them.

“No,” said Dirk. “Certainly not.”

“So you mean the envelope is not yours either?”

“I - that is - “

“Aha! So you are also being extremely… what was it?”

“Inquisitive and presumptuous. I do not deny it. But I am aprivate detective. I am paid to be inquisitive and presumptuous.Not as often or copiously as I would wish, but I am neverthelessinquisitive and presumptuous on a professional basis.”

“How sad. I think it’s much more fun being inquisitive andpresumptuous as a hobby. So you are a professional while I ammerely an amateur of Olympic standard. You don’t look like aprivate detective.”

“No private detective looks like a private detective. That’sone of the first rules of private detection.”

“But if no private detective looks like a private detective,how does a private detective know what it is he’s supposed notto look like? Seems to me there’s a problem there.”

“Yes, but it’s not one that keeps me awake at nights,” saidDirk in exasperation. “Anyway, I am not as other privatedetectives. My methods are holistic and, in a very proper senseof the word, chaotic. I operate by investigating the fundamentalinterconnectedness of all things.”

Sally Mills merely blinked at him.

“Every particle in the universe,” continued Dirk, warming tohis subject and beginning to stare a bit, “affects every otherparticle, however faintly or obliquely. Everything interconnectswith everything. The beating of a butterfly’s wings in China canaffect the course of an Atlantic hurricane. If I could interrogatethis table-leg in a way that made sense to me, or to the table-leg,then it could provide me with the answer to any question aboutthe universe. I could ask anybody I liked, chosen entirely bychance, any random question I cared to think of, and theiranswer, or lack of it, would in some way bear upon the problemto which I am seeking a solution. It is only a question ofknowing how to interpret it. Even you, whom I have metentirely by chance, probably know things that are vital to myinvestigation, if only I knew what to ask you, which I don’t,

andif only I could be bothered to, which I can't."

He paused, and said, "Please will you let me have theenvelope and the knife?"

"You make it sound as if someone's life depends on it."

Dirk dropped his eyes for a moment.

"I rather think somebody's life did depend on it," he said. Hesaid it in such a way that a cloud seemed to pass briefly overthem.

Sally Mills relented and passed the envelope and the knifeover to Dirk. A spark seemed to go out of her.

The knife was too blunt and the Sellotape too thickly applied.Dirk struggled with it for a few seconds but was unable to slicethrough it. He sat back in his seat feeling tired and irritable.

He said, "I'll go and ask them if they've got anythingsharper," and stood up, clutching the envelope.

"You should go and get your nose fixed," said Sally Millsquietly.

`"Thank you," said Dirk and bowed very slightly to her.

He picked up the bills and set out to visit the exhibition ofwaiters mounted at the rear of the cafe. He encountered a certaincoolness when he was disinclined to augment the mandatory 15per cent service charge with any voluntary additional token ofhis personal appreciation, and was told that no, that was the onlytype of knife they had and that's all there was to it.

Dirk thanked them and walked back through the caf.

Sitting in his seat talking to Sally Mills was the young manwhose knife she had purloined. He nodded to her, but she wasdeeply engrossed in conversation with her new friend and didnot notice.

"…in a coma," she was saying, "who had to be moved to aprivate hospital in the early hours. God knows why it had to bedone at that time of night. Just creates unnecessary trouble.Excuse me rabbiting on, but the patient had his own personalCoca-Cola machine and sledge-hammer with him, and that sortof thing is.all very well in a private hospital, but on a short-staffed NHS ward it just makes me tired, and I talk too muchwhen I'm tired. If I suddenly fall insensible to the floor, wouldyou let me know?"

Dirk walked on, and then noticed that Sally Mills had left thebook she had been reading on her original table, and somethingabout it caught his attention.

It was a large book, called Run Like the Devil. In fact it wasextremely large and a little dog-eared, looking more like a

puffpastry cliff than a book. The bottom half of the cover featuredthe normal woman-in-cocktail-dress-framed-in-the-sights-of-a-gun, while the top half was entirely taken up with the author'sname, Howard Bell, embossed in silver.

Dirk couldn't immediately work out what it was about thebook that had caught his eye, but he knew that some detail of thecover had struck a chord with him somewhere. He gave acircumspect glance at the girl whose coffee he had purloined,and whose five coffees and two croissants, one undelivered anduneaten, he had subsequently paid for. She wasn't looking, so hepurloined her book as well and slipped it into the pocket of hisleather coat.

He stepped out on to the street, where a passing eagleswooped out of the sky at him, nearly forcing him into the pathof a cyclist, who cursed and swore at him from a moral highground that cyclists alone seem able to inhabit.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 11

Into the well-kempt grounds that lay just on the owtskins of awell-kempt village on the fringes of the well-kempt Cotswoldsturned a less than well-kempt car.

It was a battered yellow Citron 2CV which had had onecareful owner but also three suicidally reckless ones. It made itsway up the driveway with a reluctant air as if all it asked forfrom life was to be tipped into a restful ditch in one of theadjoining meadows and there allowed to settle in gracefulabandonment, instead of which here it was being asked to dragitself all the way up this long gravelled drive which it would nodoubt soon be called upon to drag itself all the way back downagain, to what possible purpose it was beyond its wit to imagine.

It drew to a halt in front of the elegant stone entrance to themain building, and then began to trundle slowly backwardsagain until its occupant yanked on the handbrake, which evokedfrom the car a sort of strangled “eek”.

A door flopped open, wobbling perilously on its oneremaining hinge, and there emerged from the car a pair of thesort of legs which soundtrack editors are unable to see withoutneeding to slap a smoky saxophone solo all over, for reasonswhich no one besides soundtrack editors has ever been able tounderstand. In this particular case, however, the saxophonewould have been silenced by the proximity of the kazoo whichthe same soundtrack editor would almost certainly have slappedall over the progress of the vehicle.

The owner of the legs followed them in the usual manner,closed the car door tenderly, and then made her way into thebuilding.

The car remained parked in front of it.

After a few minutes a porter came out and examined it,adopted a disapproving manner and then, for lack of anythingmore positive to do, went back in.

A short time later, Kate was shown into the office of MrRalph Standish, the Chief Consultant Psychologist and one ofthe directors of the Woodshead Hospital, who was justcompleting a telephone conversation.

“Yes, it is true,” he was saying, “that sometimes unusuallyintelligent and sensitive children can appear to be stupid. But,Mrs Benson, stupid children can sometimes appear to be stupidas well. I think that’s something you might have to consider. Iknow it’s very painful, yes. Good day, Mrs Benson.”

He put the phone away into a desk drawer and spent a coupleof seconds collecting his thoughts before looking up.

“This is very short notice, Miss, er, Schechter,” he said to herat last.

In fact what he had said was, This is ve short notice, Miss,er-” and then he had paused and peered into another of his deskdrawers before saying “Schechter”.

It seemed to Kate that it was very odd to keep your visitors’names in a drawer, but then he clearly disliked having thingscluttering up his fine, but severely designed, black ash deskbecause there was nothing on it at all. It was completely blank,as was every other surface in his office. There was nothing onthe small neat steel and glass coffee table which sat squarelybetween two Barcelona chairs. There was nothing on top of thetwo expensive-looking filing cabinets which stood at the back ofthe room.

There were no bookshelves - if there were any books theywere presumably hidden away behind the white doors of thelarge blank built-in cupboards - and although there was oneplain black picture frame hanging on the wall, this waspresumably a temporary aberration because there was no picturein it.

Kate looked around her with a bemused air.

“Do you have no ornaments in here at all, Mr Standish?” sheasked.

He was, for a moment, somewhat taken aback by her trans-atlantic directness, but then answered her.

“Indeed I have ornaments,” he said; and pulled open anotherdrawer. He pulled out from this a small china model of a kittenplaying with a ball of wool and put it firmly on the desk in frontof him.

“As a psychologist I am aware of the important role thatornamentation plays in nourishing the human spirit,” hepronounced.

He put the china kitten back in the drawer and slid it closedwith a smooth click.

“Now.”

He clasped his hands together on the desk in front of him, andlooked at her enquiringly.

“It’s very good of you to see me at short notice, MrStandish - “

“Yes, yes, we’ve established that.”

“- but I’m sure you know what newspaper deadlines arelike.”

“I know at least as much as I would ever care to know aboutnewspapers, Miss, er - “

He opened his drawer again.

“Miss Schechter, but - “

“Well that’s partly what made me approach you,” lied Katecharmingly. “I know that you have suffered from some, well,unfortunate publicity here, and thought you might welcome theopportunity to talk about some of the more enlightening aspectsof the work at the Woodshead Hospital.” She smiled verysweetly.

“It’s only because you come to me with the highest recommendation from my very good friend and colleague Mr, er - “

“Franklin, Alan Franklin,” prompted Kate, to save thepsychologist from having to open his drawer again. AlanFranklin was a therapist whom Kate had seen for a few sessionsafter the loss of her husband Luke. He had warned her thatStandish, though brilliant, was also peculiar, even by the highstandards set by his profession.

“Franklin,” resumed Standish, “that I agreed to see you. Letme warn you instantly that if I see any resumption of this’Something nasty in the Woodshead’ mendacity appearing in thepapers as a result of this interview I will, I will - “

“`- do such things-

`What they are yet I know not - but they shall be

` The terror of the Earth ‘,” said Kate, brightly.

Standish narrowed his eyes.

“Lear, Act 2, Scene 4,” he said. “And I think you’ll find it’s`terrors’ and not `terror’.”

“Do you know, I think you’re right?” replied Kate.

Thank you, Alan, she thought. She smiled at Standish, whorelaxed into pleased superiority. It was odd, Kate reflected, thatpeople who needed to bully you were the easiest to push around.

“So you would like to know precisely what, Miss Schechter?”

“Assume,” said Kate, “that I know nothing.”

Standish smiled, as if to signify that no assumption couldpossibly give him greater pleasure.

“Very well,” he said. “The Woodshead is a research hospital.We specialise in the care and study of patients with unusual orpreviously unknown conditions, largely in the psychological orpsychiatric fields. Funds are raised in various ways. One of ourchief methods is quite simply to take in private patients atexorbitantly high fees, which they are happy to pay, or at leasthappy to complain about. There is in fact nothing to complainabout because patients who come to us privately are made fullyaware of why our fees are so high. For the money they arepaying, they are, of course, perfectly entitled to complain -

theright to complain is one of the privileges they are paying for. Insome cases we come to a special arrangement under which, inreturn for being made the sole beneficiaries of a patient's estate,we will guarantee to look after that patient for the rest of his orher life."

"So in effect you are in the business of giving scholarships topeople with particularly gifted diseases?"

"Exactly. A very good way of expressing it. We are in thebusiness of giving scholarships to people with particularly gifteddiseases. I must make a note of that. Miss Mayhew!"

He had opened a drawer, which clearly contained his officeintercom. In response to his summons one of the cupboardsopened, and tumed out to be a door into a side office - a featurewhich must have appealed to some architect who had conceivedan ideological dislike of doors. From this office there emergedobediently a thin and rather blank-faced woman in her mid-forties.

"Miss Mayhew," said Mr Standish, "we are in the business ofgiving scholarships to people with particularly gifted diseases."

"Very good, Mr Standish," said Miss Mayhew, and retreatedbackwards into her office, pulling the door closed after her. Katewondered if it was perhaps a cupboard after all.

"And we do have some patients with some really quiteoutstanding diseases at the moment," enthused the psychologist."Perhaps you would care to come and see one or two of ourcurrent stars?"

"Indeed I would. That would be most interesting, MrStandish, you're very kind," said Kate.

"You have to be kind in this job," Standish replied, andflicked a smile on and off at her.

Kate was trying to keep some of the impatience she wasfeeling out of her manner. She did not take to Mr Standish, andwas beginning to feel that there was a kind of Martian quality tohim. Furthermore, the only thing she was actually interested inwas discovering whether or not the hospital had accepted a newadmission in the early hours of the morning, and if so, where hewas and whether she could see him.

She had originally tried the direct approach but had beenrebuffed by a mere telephone receptionist on the grounds thatshe didn't have a name to ask for. Simply asking if they had anytall, well-built, blond men in residence had seemed to createentirely the wrong impression. At least, she insisted to herselfthat it was entirely the wrong impression. A quick phone call toAlan Franklin had set her up for this altogether more

subtleapproach.

“Good!” A look of doubt passed momentarily over MrStandish’s face, and he summoned Miss Mayhew from out ofher cupboard again.

“Miss Mayhew, that last thing I just said to you - “

“Yes, Mr Standish?”

“I assume you realised that I wished you to make a note of itfor me?”

“No, Mr Standish, but I will be happy to do so.”

“Thank you,” said Mr Standish with a slightly tense look.”And tidy up in here please. The place looks a - “

He wanted to say that the place looked a mess, but wasfrustrated by its air of clinical sterility.

“Just tidy up generally,” he concluded.

“Yes, Mr Standish.”

The psychologist nodded tersely, brushed a non-existentspeck of dust off the top of his desk, flicked another brief smileon and off at Kate and then escorted her out of his office into thecorridor which was immaculately laid with the sort of beigecarpet which gave everyone who walked on it electric shocks.

“Here, you see,” said Standish, indicating part of the wallthey were walking past with an idle wave of his hand, but notmaking it in any way clear what it was he wished her to see orwhat she was supposed to understand from it.

“And this,” he said, apparently pointing at a door hinge.

“Ah,” he added, as the door swung open towards them. Katewas alarmed to find herself giving a little expectant start everytime a door opened anywhere in this place. This was not the sortof behaviour she expected of a worldly-wise New Yorkerjournalist, even if she didn’t actually live in New York and onlywrote travel articles for magazines. It still was not right for herto be looking for large blond men every time a door opened.

There was no large blond man. There was instead a small,sandy-haired girl of about ten years old, being pushed along in awheelchair. She seemed very pale, sick and withdrawn, and wasmurmuring something soundlessly to herself. Whatever it wasshe was murmuring seemed to cause her worry and agitation,and she would flop this way then that in her chair as if trying toescape from the words coming out of her mouth. Kate wasinstantly moved by the sight of her, and on an impulse asked thenurse who was pushing her along to stop.

She squatted down to look kindly into the girl’s face, whichseemed to please the nurse a little, but Mr Standish less so.

Kate did not try to demand the girl’s attention, merely gaveher

an open and friendly smile to see if she wanted to respond,but the girl seemed unwilling or unable to. Her mouth workedaway endlessly, appearing almost to lead an existence that wasindependent of the rest of her face.

Now that Kate looked at her more closely it seemed that shelooked not so much sick and withdrawn as weary, harassed andunutterably fed up. She needed a little rest, she needed peace,but her mouth kept motoring on.

For a fleeting instant her eyes caught Kate's, and the messageKate received was along the lines of "I'm sorry but you'll justhave to excuse me while all this is going on". The girl took adeep breath, half-closed her eyes in resignation and continuedher relentless silent murmuring.

Kate leant forward a little in an attempt to catch any actualwords, but she couldn't make anything out. She shot an enquir-ing look up at Standish.

He said, simply, "Stock market prices."

A look of amazement crept over Kate's face.

Standish added with a wry shrug, "Yesterday's, I'm afraid."

Kate flinched at having her reaction so wildly misinterpreted,and hurriedly looked back at the girl in order to cover herconfusion.

"You mean," she said, rather redundantly, "she's just sittinghere reciting yesterday's stock market prices?" The girl rolledher eyes past Kate's.

"Yes," said Standish. "It took a lip reader to work out whatwas going on. We all got rather excited, of course, but thencloser examination revealed that they were only yesterday'swhich was a bit of a disappointment. Not that significant a casereally. Aberrant behaviour. Interesting to know why she does it,but - "

"Hold on a moment," said Kate, trying to sound veryinterested rather than absolutely horrified, "are you saying thatshe is reciting - what? - the closing prices over and over, or - "

"No. That's an interesting feature of course. She pretty muchkeeps pace with movements in the market over the course of awhole day. Just twenty-four hours out of step."

"But that's extraordinary, isn't it?"

"Oh yes. Quite a feat."

"A feat?"

"Well, as a scientist, I have to take the view that since theinformation is freely available, she is acquiring it throughnormal channels. There's no necessity in this case to inventany supernatural or paranonnal dimension. Occam's razor.Shouldn't needlessly multiply entities."

“But has anyone seen her studying the newspapers, orcopying stuff down over the phone?”

She looked up at the nurse, who shook her head, dumbly.

“No, never actually caught her at it,” said Standish. “As Isaid, it’s quite a feat. I’m sure a stage magician or memory mancould tell you how it was done.”

“Have you asked one?”

“No. Don’t hold with such people.”

“But do you really think that she could possibly be doing thisdeliberately?” insisted Kate.

“Believe me, if you understood as much about people as I do,Miss, er - you would believe anything,” said Standish, in hismost professionally reassuring tone of voice.

Kate stared into the tired, wretched face of the young girl andsaid nothing.

“You have to understand,” said Standish, “that we have to berational about this. If it was tomorrow’s stock market prices, itwould be a different story. That would be a phenomenon of anentirely different character which would merit and demand themost rigorous study. And I’m sure we’d have no difficulty infunding the research. There would be absolutely no problemabout that.”

“I see,” said Kate, and meant it.

She stood up, a little stiftly, and brushed down her skirt.

“So,” she said, and felt ashamed of herself, “who is yournewest patient? Who has arrived most recently, then?” Sheshuddered at the crassness of the non sequitur, but remindedherself that she was there as a journalist, so it would not seemodd.

Standish waved the nurse and the wheelchair with its sadcharge on their way. Kate glanced back at the girl once, and thenfollowed Standish through the swing-doors and into the nextsection of corridor, which was identical to the previous one.

“Here, you see,” said Standish again, this time apparently inrelation to a window frame.

“And this,” he said, pointing at a light.

He had obviously either not heard her question or wasdeliberately ignoring it. Perhaps, thought Kate, he was simplytreating it with the contempt it deserved.

It suddenly dawned on her what all this Here you see, andAnd thising was about. He was asking her to admire the qualityof the decor. The windows were sashes, with finely made andbeautifully painted beads; the light fittings were of a heavy dullmetal, probably nickel-plated - and so on.

“Very fine,” she said accommodatingly, and then noticed thatthis had sounded an odd thing to say in her American accent.

“Nice place you’ve got here,” she added, thinking that thatwould please him.

It did. He allowed himself a subdued beam of pleasure.

“We like to think of it as a quality caring environment,” hesaid.

“You must get a lot of people wanting to come here,” Katecontinued, plugging away at her theme. “How often do youadmit new patients? When was the last -?”

With her left hand she carefully restrained her right handwhich wanted to strangle her at this moment.

A door they were passing was slightly ajar, and she tried,unobtrusively, to look in.

“Very well, we’ll take a look in here,” said Standish immediately, pushing the door fully open, on what transpired to bequite a small room.

“Ah yes,” Standish said, recognising the occupant. Heushered Kate in.

The occupant of the room was another non-large, non-blondperson. Kate was beginning to find the whole visit to besomething of an emotionally wearing experience, and she had afeeling that things were not about to ease up in that respect.

The man sitting in the bedside chair while his bed was beingmade up by a hospital orderly was one of the most deeply anddisturbingly tousled people that Kate had ever seen. In fact itwas only his hair that was tousled, but it was tousled to such anextreme degree that it seemed to draw all of his long face up intoits distressed chaos.

He seemed quite content to sit where he was, but there wassomething tremendously vacant about his contentedness - heseemed literally to be content about nothing. There was acompletely empty space hanging in the air about eighteen inchesin front of his face, and his contentedness, if it sprang fromanything, sprang from staring at that.

There was also a sense that he was waiting for something.Whether it was something that was about to happen at anymoment, or something that was going to happen later in theweek, or even something that was going to happen some littlewhile after hell iced over and British Telecom got the phonesfixed was by no means apparent because it seemed to be all thesame to him. If it happened he was ready for it and if it didn’t-he was content.

Kate found such contentedness almost unbearably distressing.

“What’s the matter with him?” she said quietly, and theninstantly realised that she was talking as if he wasn’t there whenhe could probably speak perfectly well for himself. Indeed, atthat moment, he suddenly did speak.

“Oh, er, hi,” he said. “OK, yeah, thank you.”

“Er, hello,” she said, in response, though it didn’t seem quiteto fit. Or rather, what he had said didn’t seem quite to fit.Standish made a gesture to her to discourage her from speaking.

“Er, yeah, a bagel would be fine,” said the contented man. Hesaid it in a flat kind of tone, as if merely repeating something hehad been given to say.

“Yeah, and maybe some juice,” he added. “OK, thanks.” Hethen relaxed into his state of empty watchfulness.

“A very unusual condition,” said Standish, “that is to say, wecan only believe that it is entirely unique. I’ve certainly neverheard of anything remotely like it. It has also proved virtuallyimpossible to verify beyond question that it is what it appears tobe, so I’m glad to say that we have been spared theembarrassment of attempting to give the condition a name.”

“Would you like me to help Mr Elwes back to bed?” askedthe orderly of Standish. Standish nodded. He didn’t bother towaste words on minions.

The orderly bent down to talk to the patient.

“Mr Elwes?” he said quietly.

Mr Elwes seemed to swim up out of a reverie.

“Mmmm?” he said, and suddenly looked around. He seemedconfused.

“Oh! Oh? What?” he said faintly.

“Would you like me to help you back to bed?”

“Oh. Oh, thank you, yes. Yes, that would be kind.”

Though clearly dazed and bewildered, Mr Elwes was quiteable to get himself back into bed, and all the orderly needed tosupply was reassurance and encouragement. Once Mr Elweswas well settled, the orderly nodded politely to Standish andKate and made his exit.

Mr Elwes quickly lapsed back into his trancelike state, lyingpropped up against an escarpment of pillows. His head droppedforward slightly and he stared at one of his knees, poking upbonily from under the covers.

“Get me New York,” he said.

Kate shot a puzzled glance at Standish, hoping for some kindof explanation, but got none.

“Oh, OK,” said Mr Elwes, “it’s 541 something. Hold on.” Hespoke another four digits of a number in his dead, flat voice.

“What is happening here?” asked Kate at last.

“It took us rather a long time to work it out. It was only quiteby the remotest chance that someone discovered it. Thattelevision was on in the room… “

He pointed to the small portable set off to one side of the bed.

“. . .tuned to one of those chat programme things, whichhappened to be going out live. Most extraordinary thing. MrElwes was sitting here muttering about how much he hated theBBC - don’t know if it was the BBC, perhaps it was one ofthose other channels they have now - and was expressing anopinion about the host of the programme, to the effect that heconsidered him to be a rectum of some kind, and sayingfurthermore that he wished the whole thing was over and that,yes, all right he was coming, and then suddenly what he wassaying and what was on the television began in someextraordinary way almost to synchronise.”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” said Kate.

“I’d be surprised if you did,” said Standish. “Everything thatElwes said was then said just a moment later on the television bya gentleman by the name of Mr Dustin Hoffman. It seems thatMr Elwes here knows everything that this Mr Hoffman is goingto say just a second or so before he says it. It is not, I have tosay, something that Mr Hoffman would be very pleased about ifhe knew. Attempts have been made to alert the gentleman to theproblem, but he has proved to be somewhat difficult to reach.”

“Just what the shit is going on here?” asked Mr Elwesplacidly.

“Mr Hoffman is, we believe, currently making a film onlocation somewhere on the west coast of America.”

He looked at his watch.

“I think he has probably just woken up in his hotel and ismaking his early morning phone calls,” he added.

Kate was gazing with astonishment between Standish and theextraordinary Mr Elwes.

“How long has the poor man been like this?”

“Oh, about five years I think. Started absolutely out of theblue. He was sitting having dinner with his family one day asusual when suddenly he started complaining about his caravan.And then shortly afterwards about how he was being shot. Hethen spent the entire night talking in his sleep, repeating thesame apparently meaningless phrases over and over again andalso saying that he didn’t think much of the way they werewritten. It was a very trying time for his family, as you canimagine, living with such a perfectionist actor and not evenrealising it. It now seems very surprising how long it took

themto identify what was occurring. Particularly when he once wokethem all up in the early hours of the morning to thank them andthe producer and the director for his Oscar."

Kate, who didn't realise that the day was still only softeningher up for what was to come, made the mistake of thinking thatit had just reached a climax of shock.

"The poor man," she said in a hushed voice. "What a patheticstate to be in. He's just living as someone else's shadow."

"I don't think he's in any pain."

Mr Elwes appeared to be quietly locked in a bitter argumentwhich seemed to touch on the definitions of the words "points""gross", "profits" and "limo".

"But the implications of this are extraordinary aren't they?"said Kate. "He's actually saying these things moments beforeDustin Hoffman?"

"Well, it's all conjecture of course. We've only got a fewclear instances of absolute correlation and we just haven't gotthe opportunity to do more thorough research. One has torecognise that those few instances of direct correlation were notrigorously documented and could more simply be explained ascoincidence. The rest could be merely the product of anelaborate fantasy."

"But if you put this case next to that of the girl we justsaw… "

"Ah, well we can't do that you see. We have to judge eachcase on its own merits."

"But they're both in the same world…"

"Yes, but there are separate issues. Obviously, if Mr Elweshere could demonstrate significant precognition of, for instance,the head of the Soviet Union or, better still, the President of theUnited States, then clearly there would be important defenceissues involved and one might be prepared to stretch a point onthe question of what is and what is not coincidence and fantasy,but for a mere screen actor - that is, a screen actor with noapparent designs on political office - I think that, no, we have tostick to the principles of rigorous science.

"So," he added, turning to leave, and drawing Kate with him,"I think that in the cases of both Mr Elwes and, er, what-was-her-name, the charming girl in the wheelchair, it may be that weare not able to be of much more help to them, and we may needthe space and facilities for more deserving cases."

Kate could think of nothing to say to this and followed,seething dumbly.

"Ah, now here we have an altogether much more interestingand promising case," said Standish, forging on ahead throughthe next set of double doors.

Kate was trying to keep her reactions under control, butnevertheless even someone as glassy and Martian as MrStandish could not help but detect that his audience was notabsolutely with him. A little extra brusqueness and impatiencecrept into his demeanour, to join forces with the large quantitiesof brusqueness and impatience which were already there.

They paced down the corridor for a few seconds in silence.Kate was looking for other ways of casually introducing thesubject of recent admissions, but was forced to concede toherself that you cannot attempt to introduce the same subjectthree times in a row without beginning to lose that vital qualityof casualness. She glanced as surreptitiously as she could at eachdoor they passed, but most were firmly closed, and the ones thatwere not revealed nothing of interest.

She glanced out of a window as they walked past it andnoticed a van turning into a roar courtyard. It caught herattention in the brief instant that it was within her view becauseit very clearly wasn't a baker's van or a laundry van. Baker'svans and laundry vans advertise their business and have wordslike "Bakery" and "Laundry" painted on them, whereas this vanwas completely blank. It had absolutely nothing to say to anyonennd it said it loudly and distinctly.

It was a large, heavy, serious-looking van that was almost onthe verge of being an actual lorry, and it was painted in auniform dark metallic grey. It reminded Kate of the huge gun-metal-grey freight lorries which thunder through Bulgaria andYugoslavia on their way from Albania with nothing but theword "Albania" stencilled on their sides. She rememberedwondering what it was that the Albanians exported in such ananonymous way, but when on one occasion she had looked it up,she found that their only export was electricity - which, if sheremembered her high school physics correctly, was unlikely tobe moved around in lorries.

The large, serious-looking van turned and started to reversetowards a rear entrance to the hospital. Whatever it was that thevan usually carried, Kate thought, it was about either to pick itup or deliver it. She moved on.

A few moments later Standish arrived at a door, knocked at itgently and looked enquiringly into the room within. He thenbeckoned to Kate to follow him in.

This was a room of an altogether different sort. Immediatelywithin the door was an ante-room with a very large windowthrough which the main room could be seen. The two

roomswere clearly sound-proofed from each other, because the ante-room was decked out with monitoring equipment andcomputers, not one of which but didn't hum loudly to itself, andthe main room contained a woman lying in bed, asleep.

"Mrs Elspeth May," said Standish, and clearly felt that hewas introducing the top of the bill. Her room was obviously avery good one - spacious and furnished comfortably and expen-sively. Fresh flowers stood on every surface, and the bedsidetable on which Mrs May's knitting lay was of mahogany.

She herself was a comfortably shaped, silver-haired lady oflate middle age, and she was lying asleep half propped up in bedon a pile of pillows, wearing a pink woolly cardigan. Aher amoment it became clear to Kate that though she was asleep shewas by no means inactive. Her head lay back peacefully with hereyes closed, but her right hand was clutching a pen which wasscribbling away furiously on a large pad of paper which laybeside her. The hand, like the wheelchair girl's mouth, seemedto lead an independent and feverishly busy existence. Somesmall pinkish electrodes were taped to Mrs May's forehead justbelow her hairline, and Kate assumed that these were providingsome of the readings which danced across the computer screensin the ante-room in which she and Standish stood. Two white-coated men and a woman sat monitoring the equipment, and anurse stood watching through the window. Standish exchanged acouple of brief words with them on the current state of thepatient, which was universally agreed to be excellent.

Kate could not escape the impression that she ought to knowwho Mrs May was, but she didn't and was forced to ask.

"She is a medium," said Standish a little crossly, "as Iassumed you would know. A medium of prodigious powers. Sheis currently in a trance and engaged in automatic writing. She istaking dictation. Virtually every piece of dictation she receivesis of inestimable value. You have not heard of her?"

Kate admitted that she had not.

"Well, you are no doubt familiar with the lady who claimedthat Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert were dictating music toher?"

"Yes, I did hear about that. There was a lot of stuff in coloursupplements about her a few years ago."

"Her claims were, well, interesting, if that's the sort of thingyou're interested in. The music was certainly more consistentwith what might be produced by each of those gentlemenquickly and before breakfast, than it was with what you wouldexpect from a musically unskilled middle-aged housewife."

Kate could not let this pomposity pass.

“That’s a rather sexist viewpoint,” she said, “George Eliotwas a middle-aged housewife.”

“Yes, yes,” said Standish testily, “but she wasn’t takingmusical dictation from the deceased Wolfgang Amadeus. That’sthe point I’m making. Please try and follow the logic of thisargument and do not introduce irrelevancies. If I felt for amoment that the example of George Eliot could shed any lighton our present problem, you could rely on me to introduce itmyself.

“Where was I?”

“I don’t know.”

“Mabel. Doris? Was that her name? Let us call her Mabel.The point is that the easiest way of dealing with the Dorisproblem was simply to ignore it. Nothing very important hingedon it at alI. A few concerts. Second rate material. But here, herewe have something of an altogether diffenent nature.”

He said this last in hushed tones and turned to study a TVmonitor which stood among the bank of computer screens. Itshowed a close-up of Mrs May’s hand scuttling across her padof paper. Her hand largely obscured what she had written, but itappeared to be mathematics of some kind.

“Mrs May is, or so she claims, taking dictation from some ofthe greatest physicists. From Einstein and from Heisenberg andPlanck. And it is very hard to dispute her claims, because theinformation being produced here, by automatic writing, bythis…untutored lady, is in fact physics of a very profound order.

“From the late Einstein we are getting more and morerefinements to our picture of how time and space work at amacroscopic level, and from the late Heisenberg and Planck weare increasing our understanding of the fundamental structuresof matter at a quantum level. And there is absolutely no doubtthat this information is edging us closer and closer towards theelusive goal of a Grand Unified Field Theory of Everything.

“Now this produces a very interesting, not to say somewhatembarrassing situation for scientists because the means by whichthe information is reaching us seems to be completely contraryto the meaning of the information.”

“It’s like Uncle Henry,” said Kate, suddenly.

Standish looked at her blankly.

“Uncle Henry thinks he’s a chicken,” Kate explained.

Standish looked at her blankly again.

“You must have heard it,” said Kate. “`We’re terribly worriedabout Uncle Henry. He thinks he’s a chicken.’ `Well, why

don'tyou send him to the doctor?' `Well, we would only we need theeggs.'".

Standish stared at her as if a small but perfectly formedelderberry tree had suddenly sprung unbidden from the bridge ofher nose.

"Say that again," he said in a small, shocked voice.

"What, all of it?"

"All of it."

Kate stuck her fist on her hip and said it again, doing thevoices with a bit more dash and Southern accents this time.

"'That's brilliant," Standish breathed when she had done.

"You must have heard it before," she said, a little surprisedby this response. "It's an old joke."

"No," he said, "I have not. We need the eggs. We need the eggs. We need the eggs. `We can't send him to the doctorbecause we need the eggs.' An astounding insight into thecentral paradoxes of the human condition and of ourindefatigable facility for constructing adaptive rationales toaccount for it. Good God."

Kate shrugged.

"And you say this is a joke?" demanded Standishincredulously.

"Yes. It's very old, really."

"And are they all like that? I never realised."

"Well - "

"I'm astounded," said Standish, "utterly astounded. I thoughtthat jokes were things that fat people said on television and Inever listened to them. I feel that people have been keepingsomething from me. Nurse!"

The nurse who had been keeping watch on Mts May throughthe window jumped at being barked at unexpectedly like this.

"Er, yes, Mr Standish?" she said. He clearly made hernervous.

"Why have you never told me any jokes?"

The nurse stared at him, and quivered at the impossibility ofeven knowing how to think about answering such a question.

"Er, well… "

"Make a note of it will you? In future I will require you andall the other staff in this hospital to tell me all the jokes you haveat your disposal, is that understood?"

"Er, yes, Mr Standish - "

Standish looked at her with doubt and suspicion.

"You do know some jokes do you, nurse?" he challengedher.

"Er, yes, Mr Standish, I think, yes I do."

"Tell me one."

"What, er, now, Mr Standish?"

“This instant.”

“Er, well, um - there’s one which is that a patient wakes upafter having, well, that is, he’s been to, er, to surgery, and hewakes up and, it’s not very good, but anyway, he’s been tosurgery and he says to the doctor when he wakes up, ‘Doctor,doctor, what’s wrong with me, I can’t feel my legs.’ And thedoctor says, `Yes, I’m afraid we’ve had to amputate both yourarms.’ And that’s it really. Er, that’s why he couldn’t feel hislegs, you see.”

Mr Standish looked at her levelly for a moment or two.

“You’re on report, nurse,” he said.

“Yes, Mr Standish.”

He turned to Kate.

“Isn’t there one about a chicken crossing a road or some suchthing?”

“Er, yes,” said Kate, doubtfully. She felt she was caught in abit of a situation here.

“And how does that go?”

“Well,” said Kate, “it goes `Why did the chicken cross theroad?’”

“Yes? And?”

“And the answer is `To get to the other side’.”

“I see.” Standish considered things for a moment. “And whatdoes this chicken do when it arrives at the other side of theroad?.”

“History does not relate,” replied Kate promptly. “I think thatfalls outside the scope of the joke, which really only concernsitself with the journey of the chicken across the road and thechicken’s reasons for making it. It’s a little like a Japanese haikuin that respect.”

Kate suddenly found she was enjoying herself. She manageda surreptitious wink at the nurse, who had no idea what to makeof anything at all.

“I see,” said Standish once again, and frowned. “And dothese, er, jokes require the preparatory use of any form ofartificial stimulant?”

“Depends on the joke, depends on who it’s being told to.”

“Hmm, well I must say, you’ve certainly opened up a richfurrow for me, Miss, er. It seems to me that the whole field ofhumour could benefit from close and immediate scrutiny.Clearly we need to sort out the jokes which have any kind ofgenuine psychological value from those which merelyencourage drug abuse and should be stopped. Good.”

He turned to address the white-coated nesearcher who

wasstudying the TV monitor on which Mrs May's scribblings werebeing tracked.

"Anything fresh of value from Mr Einstein?" he asked.

The researrher did not move his eyes from the screen. Hereplied, "It says `How would you like your eggs? Poached orboiled?'"

Again, Standish paused.

"Interesting," he said, "very interesting. Continue to make atcareful note of everything she writes. Come." This last he said toKate, and made his way out of the room.

"Very strange people, physicists," he said as soon as theywere outside again. "In my experience the ones who aren'tactually dead are in some way very ill. Well, the afternoonpresses on and I'm sure that you are keen to get away and writeyour article, Miss, er. I certainly have things urgently awaitingmy attention and patients awaiting my care. So, if you have nomore questions - "

"There is just one thing, Mr Standish." Kate decided, to hellwith it. "We need to emphasise that it's up to the minute.Perhaps if you could spare a couple more minutes we could goand see whoever is your most recent admission."

"I think that would be a little tricky. Our last admission wasabout a month ago and she died of pneumonia two weeks afteradmission."

"Oh, ah. Well, perhaps that isn't so thrilling. So. No newadmissions in the last couple of days. No admissions of anyoneparticularly large or blond or Nordic, with a fur coat or a sledge-hammer perhaps. I mean, just for instance." An inspirationstruck her. "A re-admission perhaps?"

Standish regarded her with deepening suspicion.

"Miss, er - "

"Schechter."

"Miss Schechter, I begin to get the impression that yourinterests in the hospital are not - "

He was interrupted at that moment by the swing-doors justbehind them in the corridor being pushed open. He looked up tosee who it was, and as he did so his manner changed.

He motioned Kate sharply to stand aside while a large trolleybed was wheeled through the doors by an orderly. A sister andanother nurse followed in attendance, and gave the impressionthat they were the entourage in a procession rather than merelynurses about their normal business.

The occupant of the trolley was a delicately frail old manwith skin like finely veined parchment.

The rear section of the trolley was inclined upwards at a veryslight angle so that the old man could survey the world as itpassed him, and he surveyed it with a kind of quiet, benevolenthorror. His mouth hung gently open and his head lolled veryslightly, so that every slightest bump in the progress of thetrolley caused it to roll a little to one side or the other. Yet inspite of his fragile listlessness, the air he emanated was that ofvery quietly, very gently, owning everything.

It was the one eye which conveyed this. Each thing it restedon, whether it was the view through a window, or the nurse whowas holding back the door so that the trolley could movethrough it without impediment, or whether it was on MrStandish, who suddenly was all obsequious charm andobeisance, all seemed instantly gathered up into the domainruled by that eye.

Kate wondered for a moment how it was that eyes conveyedsuch an immense amount of information about their owners.They were, after all, merely spheres of white gristle. Theyhardly changed as they got older, apart from getting a bit redderand a bit runnier. The iris opened and closed a bit, but that wasall. Where did all this flood of information come from? Particularly in the case of a man with only one of them and onlya sealed up flap of skin in place of the other.

She was interrupted in this line of thought by the fact that atthat instant the eye in question moved on from Standish andsettled on her. The grip it exerted was so startling that shealmost yelped.

With the frailest of faint motions the old man signalled to theorderly who was pushing the trolley to pause. The trolley drewto a halt and when the noise of its rolling wheels was stilledthere was, for a moment, no other noise to be heard other thanthe distant hum of an elevator.

Then the elevator stopped.

Kate returned his look with a little smiling frown as if to say,"Sorry, do I know you?" and then wondered to herself if in factshe did. There was some fleeting familiarity about his face, butshe couldn't quite catch it. She was impressed to notice thatthough this was only a trolley bed he was in, the bed linen thathis hands lay on was real linen, freshly laundered and ironed.

Mr Standish coughed slightly and said, "Miss, er, this is oneof our most valued and, er, cherished patients, Mr-"

"Are you quite comfortable, Mr Odwin?" interrupted theSister helpfully. But there was no need. This was one patientwhose name Standish most certainly knew.

Odin quieted her with the slightest of gestures.

“Mr Odwin,” said Standish, “this is Miss, er - “

Kate was about to introduce herself once more when she wassuddenly taken completely by surprise.

“I know exactly who she is,” said Odin in a quiet but distinctvoice, and there was in his eye for a moment the sense of anaerosol looking meaningfully at a wasp.

She tried to be very formal and English.

“I’m afraid,” she said stiffly, “that you have the advantage ofme.”

“Yes,” said Odin.

He gestured to the orderly, and together they resumed theirleisurely passage down the corridor. Glances were exchangedbetween Standish and the Sister, and then Kate was startled tonotice that there was someone else standing in the corridor therewith them.

He had not, presumably, appeared there by magic. He hadmerely stood still when the trolley moved on, and his height, orrather his lack of it, was such that he had simply hitherto beenhidden behind it.

Things had been much better when he had been hidden.

There are some people you like immediately, some whomyou think you might learn to like in the fullness of time, andsome that you simply want to push away from you with a sharpstick. It was instantly apparent into which category, for Kate, theperson of Toe Rag fell. He grinned and stared at her, or rather,appeared to stare at some invisible fly darting round her head.

He ran up, and before she could prevent him, grabbed hold ofher right hand in his and shook it wildly up and down.

“I, too, have the advantage of you, Miss Schechter,” he said,and gleefully skipped away up the corridor.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 12

The large, serious-looking grey van moved smoothly down thedriveway, emerged through the stone gates and dipped sedatelyas it turned off the gravel and on to the asphalt of the publicroad. The road was a windy country lane lined with the wintrysilhouettes of leafless oaks and dead elms. Grey clouds werepiled high as pillows in the sky. The van made its statelyprogress away down the lane and soon was lost among itsfurther twists and turns.

A few minutes later the yellow Citron made its less statelyappearance between the gates. It turned its splayed wheels up onto the camber of the lane and set off at a slow but difficult rate inthe same direction.

Kate was rattled.

The last few minutes had been rather unpleasant. Standishwas clearly an oddly behaved man at the best of times, but aftertheir encounter with the patient named Odwin, he had turnedunequivocally hostile. It was the frightening hosulity of one whowas himself frightened - of what, Kate did not know.

Who was she? he had demanded to know. How had shewheedled a refenence out of Alan Franklin, a respected man inthe profession? What was she after? What - and this seemed tobe the big one - had she done to arouse the disapprobation of MrOdwin?

She held the car grimly to the road as it negotiated the bendswith considerable difficulty and the straight sections with onlyslightly less. The car had landed her in court on one occasionwhen one of its front wheels had sailed off on a little expeditionof its own and nearly caused an accident. The police witness incourt had referred to her beloved Citron as “the alleged car”and the name had subsequently stuck. She was particularly fondof the alleged car for many reasons. If one of its doors, forinstance, fell off she could put it back on herself, which is morethan you could say for a BMW.

She wondered if she looked as pale and wan as she felt, butthe rear-view mirror was rattling around under the seat so shewas spared the knowledge.

Standish himself had become quite white and shaky at thevery idea of anybody crossing Mr Odwin and had dismissed outof hand Kate’s attempts to deny that she knew anything of himat all. If that were the case, he had demanded of her, why thenhad Mr Odwin made it perfectly clear that he knew her? Wasshe accusing

Mr Odwin of being a liar? If she was then sheshould have a care for herself.

Kate did not know. The encounter with Mr Odwin wascompletely inexplicable to her. But she could not deny to herselfthat the man packed some kind of punch. When he looked at youyou stayed looked at. But beneath the disturbing quality of hissteady gaze had lain some even more disturbing undercurrents.They were more disturbing because they were undercurrents ofweakness and fear.

And as for the other creature. . .

Clearly he was the cause of the stories that had arisen recentlyin the more extremely abhorrent sectors of the tabloid pressabout there being “Something Nasty in the Woodshead”. Thestories had, of course, been offensive and callously insensitiveand had largely been ignored by everybody in the country exceptfor those very few millions who were keen on offensive andcallously insensitive things.

The stories had claimed that people in the nrea had been”terrorised” by some repulsively deformed “goblin-like”creature who regularly broke out of the Woodshead andcommitted an impressively wide range of unspeakable acts.

Like most people, Kate had assumed, insofar as she hadthought about it at all, that what had actually happened was thatsome poor bewildered mental patient had wandered out of thegrounds and given a couple of passing old ladies a bit of a turn,and that the slavering hacks of Wapping had done the rest. Nowshe was a little more shaky and a little less sure.

He - it - had known her name.

What could she make of that?

What she made of it was a wrong turning. In herpreoccupation she missed the turning that would take her on tothe main road back to London, and then had to work out what todo about it. She could simply do a three-point turn and go back,but it was a long time since she had last put the car into reversegear, and she was frankly a bit nervous about how it would taketo it.

She tried taking the next two right turns to see if that wouldset her straight, but she had no great hopes of this actuallyworking, and was right not to have. She drove on for two orthree miles, knowing that she was on the wrong rmad but at least,judging from the position of the lighter grey smear in the greyclouds, going in the right direction.

After a while she settled down to this new route. A couple ofsignposts she passed made it clear to her that she was merelytaking the B route back to London now, which she was

perfectlyhappy to do. If she had thought about it in advance, she wouldprobably have chosen to do so anyway in preference to the busytrunk road.

The trip had been a total failure, and she would have done farbetter simply to have stayed soaking in the bath all afternoon.The whole experience had been thoroughly disturbing, vergingon the frightening, and she had drawn a complete blank as far asher actual objective was concemed. It was bad enough having anobjective that she could hardly bring herself to admit to, withouthaving it completely fall apart on her as well. A sense of stalefutility gradually closed in on her along with the generalgreyness of the sky.

She wondered if she was going very slightly mad. Her lifeseemed to have drifted completely out of her control in the lastfew days, and it was distressing to realise just how fragile hergrip was when it could so easily be shattered by a relativelyminor thunderbolt or meteorite or whatever it was.

The word “thunderbolt” seemed to have arrived in the middleof that thought without warning and she didn’t know what tomake of it, so she just let it lie there at the bottom of her mind,like the towel lying on her bathroom floor that she hadn’t beenbothered to pick up.

She longed for some sun to break through. The miles groundalong under her wheels, the clouds ground her down, and shefound herself increasingly thinking of penguins. At last she feltshe could stand it no more and decided that a few minutes’ walkwas what she needed to shake her out of her mood.

She stopped the car at the side of the road, and the elderlyJaguar which had been following her for the last seventeen milesran straight into the back of her, which worked just as well.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 13

With a delicious shock of rage Kate leapt, invigorated, out of hercar and ran to harangue the driver of the other car who was, inturn, leaping out of his in order to harangue her.

“Why don’t you look where you’re going?” she yelled at him.He was a rather overweight man who had been driving wearinga long leather coat and a rather ugly red hat, despite the discom-fort this obviously involved. Kate warmed to him for it.

“Why don’t I look where I’rn going?” he replied heatedly.”Don’t you look in your near-view mirror?”

“No,” said Kate, putting her fists on her hips.

“Oh,” said her adversary. “Why not?”

“Because it’s under the seat.”

“I see,” he replied grimly. “Thank you for being so frank withme. Do you have a lawyer?”

“Yes I do, as a matter of fact,” said Kate. She said it with vimand hauteur.

“Is he any good?” said the man in the hat. “I’m going to needone. Mine’s popped into prison for a while.”

“Well, you certainly can’t have mine.”

“Why not?”

“Don’t be absurd. It would be a clear conflict of interest.”

Her adversary folded his arms and leant back against the bon-net of his car. He took his time to survey the surroundings. Thelane was growing dim as the early winter evening began to settleon the land. He then leant into his car to turn on his hazardwarning indicators. The rear amber lights winked prettily on thescrubby grass of the roadside. The front lights were buried in therear of Kate’s Citron and were in no fit state to wink.

He resumed his leaning posture and looked Kate up and downappraisingly.

“You are a driver,” he said, “and I use the word in the loosestpossible sense, i.e. meaning merely somebody who occupies thedriving seat of what I will for the moment call - but I use theterm strictly without prejudice - a car while it is proceedingalong the road, of stupendous, I would even say verging on thesuperhuman, lack of skill. Do you catch my drift?”

“No.”

“I mean you do not drive well. Do you know you’ve been allover the road for the last seventeen miles?”

“Seventeen miles!” exclaimed Kate. “Have you been follow-ing me?”

“Only up to a point,” said Dirk. “I’ve tried to stay on this sideof the road.”

“I see. Well, thank you in turn for being so frank with me.This, I need hardly tell you, is an outrage. You’d better get your-self a damn good lawyer, because mine’s going to stick red-hotskewers in him.”

“Perhaps I should get myself a kebab instead.”

“You look as if you’ve had quite enough kebabs. May I askyou why you were following me?”

“You looked as if you knew where you were going. To beginwith at least. For the first hundred yards or so.”.

“What the hell’s it got to do with you where I was going?”

“Navigational technique of mine.”

Kate narrowed her eyes.

She was about to demand a full and instant explanation of thispreposterous remark when a passing white Ford Sierra sloweddown beside them.

The driver wound down the window and leant out. “Had acrash then?” he shouted at them.

“Yes.”

“Ha!” he said and drove on.

A second or two later a Peugeot stopped by them.

“Who was that just now?” the driver asked them, in referenceto the previous driver who had just stopped.

“I don’t know,” said Dirk.

“Oh,” said the driver. “You look as if you’ve bad a crash ofsome sort.”

“Yes,” said Dirk.

“Thought so,” said the driver and drove on.

“You don’t get the same quality of passers-by these days, doyou?” said Dirk to Kate.

“You get hit by some real dogs, too,” said Kate. “I still wantto know why you were following me. You realise that it’s hardfor me not to see you in the role of an extremely sinister sort of aperson.”

“That’s easily explained,” said Dirk. “Usually I am. On thisoccasion, however, I simply got lost. I was forced to takeevasive action by a large grey oncoming van which took a pro-prietorial view of the road. I only avoided it by nipping down aside lane in which I was then unable to reverse. A few turningslater nnd I was thoroughly lost. There is a school of thoughtwhich says that you should consult a map on these occasions,but to such people I merely say, `Ha! What if you have no mapto consult? What if you have a map but it’s of the Dordogne?’My own strategy is to find a car, or the nearest

equivalent, whichlooks as if it knows where it's going and follow it. I rarely endup where I was intending to go, but often I end up somewherethat I needed to be. So what do you say to that?"

"Piffle."

"A robust response. I salute you."

"l was going to say that I do the same thing myself sometimes, but I've decided not to admit that yet."

"Very wise," said Dirk. "You don't want to give away toomuch at this point. Play it enigmatic is my advice."

"I don't want your advice. Where were you trying to getbefore suddenly deciding that driving seventeen miles in theopposite direction would help you get there?"

"A place called the Woodshead."

"Ah, the mental hospital."

"You know it?"

"I've been driving away from it for the last seventeen milesand I wish it was further. Which ward will you be in? I need toknow where to send the repair bill."

"They don't have wards," said Dirk. "And I think they wouldbe distressed to hear you call it a mental hospital."

"Anything that distresses 'em is fine by me."

Dirk looked about him.

"A fine evening," he said.

"No it isn't."

"I see," said Dirk. "You have, if I may say so, the air of oneto whom her day has not been a source of joy or spiritual enrichment."

"Too damn right, it hasn't," said Kate. "I've had the sort ofday that would make St Francis of Assisi kick babies.Particularly if you include Tuesday in with today, which is thelast time I was actually conscious. And now look. My beautifulcar. The only thing I can say in favour of the whole shebang isthat at least I'm not in Oslo."

"I can see how that might cheer you."

"I didn't say it cheered me. It just about stops me killing myself. I might as well save myself the bother anyway, with peoplelike you so keen to do it for me."

"You were my able assistant, Miss Schechter."

"Stop doing that!"

"Stop doing what?"

"My name! Suddenly every stranger I meet knows my name.Would you guys please just quit knowing my name for onesecond? How can a girl be enigmatic under these conditions? The only person I met who didn't seem to know my name wasthe

only one I actually introduced myself to. All right," she said,pointing an accusing finger at Dirk, "you're not supernatural, sojust tell me how you knew my name. I'm not letting go of yourtie till you tell me."

"You haven't got hold of - "

"I have now, buster."

"Unhand me!"

"Why were you following me?" insisted Kate. "How do youknow my name?"

"I was following you for exactly the reasons stated. As foryour name, my dear lady, you practically told me yourself."

"I did not."

"I assure you, you did."

"I'm still holding your tie."

"If you are meant to be in Oslo but have been unconscioussince Tuesday, then presumably you were at the incredible ex-ploding check-in counter at Heathrow Terminal Two. It waswidely reported in the press. I expect you missed it throughbeing unconscious. I myself missed it through rampant apathy,but the events of today have rather forced it on my attention."

Kate grudgingly let go of his tie, but continued to eye himwith suspicion.

"Oh yeah?" she said. "What events?"

"Disturbing ones," said Dirk, brushing himself down. "Evenif what you had told me yourself had not been eoough to identifyyou, then the fact of your having also been today to visit theWoodshead clinched it for me. I gather from your mood ofbelligerent despondency that the man you were seeking was notthene."

"What?"

"Please, have it," said Dirk, rapidly pulling off his tie andhanding it to her. "By chance I ran into a nurse from your hospi-tal earlier today. My first encounter with her was one which, forvarious reasons, I was anxious to terminate abruptly. It was onlywhile I was standing on the pavement a minute or two later,fending off the local wildlife, that one of the words I had heardher say struck me, I may say, somewhat like a thunderbolt. Theidea was fantastically, wildly improbable. But like most fantas-tically, wildly improbable ideas it was at least as worthy ofconsideration as a more mundane one to which the facts hadbeen strenuously bent to fit.

"I returned to question her further, and she confirmed that asomewhat unusual patient had, in the early hours of the

morning,been transferred from the hospital, apparently to the Woodshead.

“She also confided to me that another patient had been almostindecently curious to find out what had become of him. Thatpatient was a Miss Kate Schechter, and I think you will agree,Miss Schechter, that my methods of navigation have their ad-vantages. I may not have gone where I intended to go, but Ithink I have ended up where I needed to be.”

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 14

After about half an hour a hefty man from the local garagearrived with a pick-up truck, a tow-rope and a son. Havinglooked at the situation he sent his son and the pick-up truckaway to deal with another job, attached the tow-rope to Kate'snow defunct car and pulled it away to the garage himself.

Kate was a little quiet about this for a minute or two, and thensaid, "He wouldn't have done that if I hadn't been anAmerican."

He had recommended to them a small local pub where hewould come and look for them when he had made his diagnosison the Citron. Since Dirk's Jaguar had only lost its front rightindicator light, and Dirk insisted that he hardly ever turned rightanyway, they drove the short distance there. As Kate, with somereluctance, climbed into Dirk's car she found the Howard Bellbook which Dirk had purloined from Sally Mills in the caf, andpounced on it. A few minutes later, walking into the pub, shewas still trying to work out if it was one she had nead or not.

The pub combined all the traditional English quatities ofhorse brasses, Formica and surliness. The sound of MichaelJackson in the other bar mingled with the mournfulintermittence of the glass-cleaning machine in this one to createan aural ambience which perfectly matched the elderlypaintwork in its dinginess.

Dirk bought himself and Kate a drink each, and then joinedher at the small comer table she had found away from the fat, T-shirted hostility of the bar.

"I have read it," she announced, having thumbed her way bynow through most of Run Like the Devil. "At least, I started itand read the first couple of chapters. A couple of months ago, infact. I don't know why I still read his books. It's pcrfectly clearthat his editor doesn't." She looked up at Dirk. "I wouldn't havethought it was your sort of thing. From what little I know ofyou."

"It isn't," said Dirk. "I, er, picked it up by mistake."

"'That's what everyone says," replied Kate. "He used to bequite good," she added "if you liked that sort of thin. Mybrother's in publishing in New York, and he says Howard Bell'sgone very strange nowadays. I get the feeling that they're all alittle afraid of him and he quite likes that. Certainly no oneseems to have the guts to tell him he should cut chapters ten totwenty-seven inclusive. And all the stuff about the goat. Thetheory is that the reason he sells so many millions of copies isthat nobody ever

does read them. If everyone who bought themactually read them they'd never bother to buy the next one andhis career would be over."

She pushed it away from her.

"Anyway," she said, "you've very cleverly told me why Iwent to the Woodshead; you haven't told me why you weregoing there yourself."

Dirk shrugged. "To see what it was like," he said, non-commitally.

"Oh yes? Well, I'll save you the bother. The place is quitehorrible."

"Describe it. In fact start with the airport."

Kate took a hefty swig at her Bloody Mary and broodedsilently for a moment while the vodka marched around insideher.

"You want to hear about the airport as well?" she said at last.

"Yes."

Kate drained the rest of her drink.

"I'll need another one, then," she said and pushed the emptyglass across at him.

Dirk braved the bug-eyedness of the batman and returned aminute or two later with a refill for Kate.

"OK," said Kate. "I'll start with the cat."

"What cat?"

"The cat I needed to ask the next-door neighbour to look afterfor me."

"Which next-door neighbour?"

"The one that died."

"I see," said Dirk. "Tell you what, why don't I just shut upand let you tell me?"

"Yes," said Kate, "that would be good."

Kate recounted the events of the last few days, or at least,those she was conscious for, and then moved on to herimpressions of the Woodshead.

Despite the distaste with which she described it, it sounded toDirt like exactly the sort of place he would love to retire to, ifpossible tomorrow. It combined a dedication to the inexplicable,which was his own persistent vice (he could only think of it assuch, and sometimes would rail against it with the fury of anaddict), with a pampered self-indulgence which was a vice towhich he would love to be able to aspire if he could ever butafford it.

At last Kate related her disturbing encounter with Mr Odwinand his repellent minion, and it was as a result of this that Dirkremained sunk in a frowning silence for a minute afterwards.

Alarge part of this minute was in fact taken up with an internalstruggle about whether or not he was going to cave in and have acigarette. He had recendy foresworn them and the struggle was aregular one and he lost it regularly, often without noticing.

He decided, with triumph, that he would not have one, andthen took one out anyway. Fishing out his lighter from thecapacious pocket of his coat involved first taking out theenvelope he had removed from Geoffrey Aristey's bathroom. Heput it on the table next to the book and lit his cigarette.

"The check-in girl at the airport…" he said at last.

"She drove me mad," said Kate, instantly. "She just wentthrough the motions of doing her job like some kind of blankmachine. Wouldn't listen, wouldn't think. I don't know wherethey find people like that."

"She used to be my secretary, in fact," said Dirk. "They don'tseem to know where to find her now, either."

"Oh. I'm sorry," said Kate immediately, and then reflectedfor a moment.

"I expect you're going to say that she wasn't like that really "she continued. "Well, that's possible. I expect she was justshielding herself from the frustrations of her job. It must driveyou insensible working at an airport. I think I would havesympathised if I hadn't been so goddamn frustated myself. I'msorry, I didn't know. So that's what you're trying to find outabout."

Dirk gave a non-committal type of nod. "Amongst otherthings," he said. Then he added, "I'm a private detective."

"Oh?" said Kate in surprise, and then looked puzzled.

"Does that bother you?"

"It's just that I have a friend who plays the double bass."

"I see," said Dirk.

"Whenever people meet him and he's struggling arnund withit, they all say the same thing, and it drives him crazy. They allsay, `I bet you wished you played the piccolo.' Nobody everworks out that that's what everybody else says. I was just tryingto work out if there was something that everybody would alwayssay to a private detective, so that I could avoid saying it."

"No. What happens is that everybody looks very shifty for amoment, and you got that very well."

"I see." Kate looked disappointed. "Well, do you have anyclues - that is to say, any idea about what's happened to yoursecretary?"

"No," said Dirk, "no idea. Just a vague image that I don'tknow what to make of." He toyed thoughtfully with hiscigarette, and

then let his gaze wander over the table again andon to the book.

He picked it up and looked it over, wondering what impulsehad made him pick it up in the first place.

“I don’t really know anything about Howard Bell,” he said.

Kate was surprised at the way he suddenly changed thesubject, but also a little relieved.

“I only know,” said Dirk, “that he sells a lot of books and thatthey all look pretty much like this. What should I know?”

“Well, there are some very strange stories about him.”

“Like what?”

“Like what he gets up to in hotel suites all across America.No one knows the details, of course, they just get the bills andpay them because they don’t like to ask. They feel they’re onsafer ground if they don’t know. Particularly about thechickens.”

“Chickens?” said Dirk. “What chickens?”

“Well apparently,” said Kate, lowering her voice and leaningforward a little, “he’s always having live chickens delivered tohis hotel room.”

Dirk frowned.

“What on earth for?” he said.

“Nobody knows. Nobody ever knows what happens to them.Nobody ever sees them again. Not,” she said, leaning evenfurther forward, and dropping her voice still further, “a singlefeather.”

Dirk wondered if he was being hopelessly innocent and nave.

“So what do people think he’s doing with them?” he asked.

“Nobody,” Kate said, “has the faintest idea. They don’t evenwant to have the faintest idea. They just don’t know.”

She shrugged and picked the book up again herself.

“The other thing David - that’s my brother - says about himis that he has the absolute perfect bestseller’s name.”

“Really?” said Dirk. “In what way?”

“David says it’s the first thing any publisher looks for in anew author. Not, `Is his stuff any good?’ or, `Is his stuff anygood once you get rid of all the adjectives?’ but, `Is his lastname nice and short and his first name just a bit longer?’ Yousee? The `Bell’ is done in huge silver letters, and the `Howard’fits neatly across the top in slightly narrower ones. Instant trademark. It’s publishing magic. Once you’ve got a name like thatthen whether you can actually write or not is a minor matter.Which in Howard Bell’s case is now a significant bonus. But it’sa very ordinary name if you write it down in the normal way,like it is here you see.”

“What?” said Dirk.

“Here on this envelope of yours.”

“Where? Let me see.”

“That’s his name there, isn’t it? Crossed out.”

“Good heavens, you’re right,” said Dirk, peering at theenvelope. “I suppose I didn’t recognise it without its trade markshape.”

“Is this something to do with him, then?” asked Kate, pickingit up and looking it over.

“I don’t know what it is, exactly,” said Dirk. “It’s somethingto do with a contract, and it may be something to do with arecord.”

“I can see it might be to do with a record.”

“How can you see that?” asked Dirk, sharply.

“Well, this name here is Dennis Hutch, isn’t it? See?”

“Oh yes. Yes, I do,” said Dirk, examining it for himself. “Er,should I know that name?”

“Well,” said Kate slowly, “it depends if you’re alive or not, Isuppose. He’s the head of the Aries Rising Record Group. Lessfamous than the Pope, I grant you, but - you know of the Pope Itake it?”

“Yes, yes,” said Dirk impatiently, “white-haired chap.”

“That’s him. He seems to be about the only person of notethis envelope hasn’t been addressed to at some time. Here’s StanDubcek, the head of Dubcek, Danton, Heidegger, Draycott. Iknow they handle the ARRGH! account.”

“The…?”

“ARRGH! Aries Rising Record Group Holdings. Getting thataccount made the agency’s fortunes.”

She looked at Dirk.

“You have the air,” she stated, “of one who knows little ofthe record business or the advertising business.”

“I have that honour,” said Dirk, graciously inclining his head.

“So what are you doing with this?”

“When I manage to get it open, I’ll know,” said Dirk. “Doyou have a knife on you?”

Kate shook her head.

“Who’s Geoffrey Anstey, then?” she asked. “He’s the onlyname not crossed out. Friend of yours?”

Dirk paled a little and didn’t immediately answer. Then hesaid, “This strange person you mentioned, this `SomethingNasty in the Woodshead’ creature. Tell me again what he said toyou.”

“He said, `I, too, have the advantage of you, MissSchechter.’” Kate tried to shrug.

Dirk weighed his thoughts uncertainly for a moment.

“I think it is just possible,” he said at last, “that you may be

insome kind of danger."

"You mean it's possible that passing lunatics may crash intome in the road? That kind of danger?"

"Maybe even worse."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes."

"And what makes you think that?"

"It's not entirely clear to me yet," replied Dirk with a frown."Most of the ideas I have at the moment have to do with thingsthat are completely impossible, so I am wary about sharingthem. They are, however, the only thoughts I have."

"I'd get some different ones, then," said Kate. "What was theSherlock Holmes principle? `Once you have discounted theimpossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, mustbe the truth.'"

"I reject that entirely," said Dirk, sharply. "The impossibleoften has a kind of integrity to it which the merely improbablelacks. How often have you been presented with an apparentlyrational explanation of something which works in all respectsother than one, which is just that it is hopelessly improbable?Your instinct is to say, `Yes, but he or she simply wouldn't dothat.'"

"Well, it happened to me today, in fact," replied Kate.

"Ah yes," said Dirk, slapping the table and making theglasses jump, "your girl in the wheelchair - a perfect example.The idea that she is somehow receiving yesterday's stock marketprices apparently out of thin air is merely impossible, andtherefore must be the case, because the idea that she ismaintaining an immensely complex and laborious hoax of nobenefit to herself is hopelessly improbable. The first idea merelysupposes that there is something we don't know about, and Godknows there are enough of those. The second, however, runscontrary to something fundamental and human which we doknow about. We should therefore be very suspicious of it and allits specious rationality."

"But you won't tell me what you think."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it sounds ridiculous. But I think you are in danger. Ithink you might be in horrible danger."

"Great. So what do you suggest I do about it?" said Katetaking a sip of her second drink, which otherwise had stayedalmost untouched.

"I suggest," said Dirk seriously, "that you come back toLondon and spend the night in my house."

Kate hooted with laughter and then had to fish out a Kleenexto wipe tomato juice off herself.

“I’m sorry, what is so extraordinary about that?” demandedDirk, rather taken aback.

“It’s just the most wonderfully perfunctory pick-up line I’veever heard.” She smiled at him. “I’m afraid the answer is aresounding `no’.”

He was, she thought, interesting, entertaining in an eccentrickind of way, but also hideously unattractive to her.

Dirk felt very awkward. “I think there has been someappalling misunderstanding,” he said. “Allow me to explainthat - “

He was interrupted by the sudden arrival in their midst of themechanic from the garage with news of Kate’s car.

“Fixed it,” he said. “In fact there were nothing to fix otherthan the bumper. Nothing new that is. The funny noise youmentioned were just the engine. But it’ll go all right. You justhave to rev her up, let in the ctutch, and then wait for a little bitlonger than you might normally expect.”

Kate thanked him a little stiffly for this advice and theninsisted on atlowing Dirk to pay the ?25 he was charging for it.

Outside, in the car park, Dirk repeated his urgent request thatKate should go with him, but she was adamant that all sheneeded was a good night’s sleep and that everything would lookbright and clear and easily capable of being coped with in themorning.

Dirk insisted that they should at least exchange phonenumbers. Kate agreed to this on condition that Dirk foundanother route back to London and didn’t sit on her tail.

“Be very careful,” Dirk called to her as her car grumbled outon to the road.

“I will,” shouted Kate, “and if anything impossible happens, Ipromise you’ll be the first to know.”

For a brief moment, the yellow undulations of the cargleamed dully in the light leaking from the pub windows andstood out against the heavily hunched greyness of the night skywhich soon swallowed it up.

Dirk tried to follow her, but his car wouldn’t start.

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Chapter 15

The clouds sank more heavily over the land, clenching into hugesullen towers, as Dirk, in a sudden excess of alarm, had to callout the man from the garage once again. He was slower to arrivewith his truck this time and bad-tempered with drink when atlast he did.

He emitted a few intemperate barks of laughter at Dirk'spredicament, then fumbled the bonnet of his car open andsubjected him to all kinds of muttered talk about manifolds,pumps, alternators and starlings and resolutely would not bedrawn on whether or not he was going to be able to get the thingto go again that night.

Dirk was unable to get a meaningful answer, or at least ananswer that meant anything to him, as to what was causing therumpus in the alternator, what ailed the fuel pump, in what waythe operation of the starter motor was being disrupted and whythe timing was off.

He did at last understand that the mechanic was also claimingthat a family of starlings had at some time in the past made theirnest in a sensitive part of the engine's workings and hadsubsequently perished horribly, taking sensitive parts of theengine with them, and at this point Dirk began to cast abouthimself desperatety for what to do.

He noticed that the mechanic's pick-up truck was standingnearby with its engine still running, and elected to make off withthis instead. Being a slightly less slow and cumbersome runnerthan the mechanic he was able to put this plan into operationwith a minimum of difficulty.

He swung out into the lane, drove off into the night andparked three miles down the road. He left the van's lights on, letdown its tyres and hid himself behind a tree. After about tenminutes his Jaguar came hurtling round the corner, passed thevan, hauled itself to an abrupt halt and reversed wildly backtowards it. The mechanic threw open the door, leapt out andhurried over to reclaim his property, leaving Dirk with theopportunity he needed to leap from behind the tree and reclaimhis own.

He spun his wheels pointedly and drove off in a kind of grimtriumph, still haunted, nevertheless, by anxieties to which hewas unable:to give a name or shape.

Kate, in the meantime, had joined the dimly glowing yellowstream that led on eventually through the westem suburbs ofActon and Ealing and into the heart of London. She crawled

upover the Westway flyover and soon afterwards turned north uptowards Primrose Hill and home.

She always enjoyed driving up alongside the park, and thedark night shapes of the trees soothed her and made her long forthe quietness of her bed.

She found the nearest parking space she could to her frontdoor, which was about thirty yards distant. She climbed out ofthe car and carefully omitted to lock it. She never left anythingof value in it, and she found that it was to her advantage ifpeople didn't have to break anything in order to find that out.The car had been stolen twice, but on each occasion it had beenfound abandoned twenty yards away.

She didn't go straight home but set off instead in the oppositedirection to get some milk and bin liners frmm the small cornershop in the next street. She agreed with the gentle-facedPakistani who ran it that she did indeed look tired, and shouldhave an early night, but on the way back she made another smalldiversion to go and lean against the railings of the park, gazeinto its darkness for a few minutes, and breathe in some of itscold, heavy night air. At last she started to head back towardsher flat. She turned into her own road and as she passed the firststreet lamp it flickered and went out, leaving her in a small poolof darkness.

That sort of thing always gives one a nasty turn.

It is said that there is nothing surprising about the notion of,for instance, a person suddenly thinking about someone theyhaven't thought about for years, and then discovering the nextday that the person has in fact just died. There are always lots ofpeople suddenly remembering people they haven't thoughtabout for ages, and always lots of people dying. In a populationthe size of, say, America the law of averages means that thisparticular coincidence must happen at least ten times a day, butit is none the less spooky to anyone who experiences it.

By the same token, there are light bulbs burning out in streetlamps all the time, and a fair few of them must go pop just assomeone is passing beneath them. Even so, it still gives theperson concerned a nasty tum, especially when the very nextstreet lamp they pass under does exactly the same thing.

Kate stood rooted to the spot.

If one coincidence can occur, she told herself, then anothercoincidence can occur. And if one coincidence happens to occurjust after another coincidence, then that is just a coincidence.There was absolutely nothing to feel alarmed about in having acouple of street lamps go pop. She was in a perfectly

normalfriendly street with houses all around her with their lights on.She looked up at the house next to her, unfortunately just as thelights in its front window chanced to go out. This waspresumably because the occupants happened to choose thatmoment to leave the room, but though it just went to show whata truly extraordinary thing coincidence can be it did tittle toimprove her state of mind.

The rest of the street was still bathed in a dim yellow glow. Itwas only the few feet immediatety around her that weresuddenly dark. The next pool of light was just a few footstepsaway in front of her. She took a deep breath, pulled herselftogether, and walked towards it, reaching its very centre at theexact instant that it, too, extinguished itself.

The occupants of the two houses she had passed on the wayalso happened to choose that moment to leave their front rooms,as did their neighbours on the opposite side of the street.

Perhaps a poputar television show had just finished. That'swhat it was. Evervone was getting up and turning off their TVsets and lights simultaneously, and the resulting power surgewas blowing some of the street lamps. Something like that. Theresulting power surge was also making her blood pound a little.She moved on, trying to be calm. As soon as she got home she'dhave a look in the paper to see what the programme had beenthat had caused three street lamps to blow.

Four.

She stopped and stood absolutely stitl under the dark lamp.More houses were darkening. What she found particulartyalarming was that they darkened at the very moment that shelooked at them.

Glance - pop.

She tried it again.

Glance - pop.

Each one she looked at darkened instantly.

Glance - pop.

She realised with a sudden start of fear that she must stopherself looking at the ones that were still lit. The rationalisationsshe had been trying to construct were now running around insideher head screaming to be let out and she let them go. She tried tolock her eyes to the ground for fear of extinguishing the wholestreet, but couldn't help tiny glances to see if it was working.

Glance - pop.

She froze her gaze, down on to the narrow path forward. Mostof the road was dark now.

There were three remaining street lamps between her and thefront door which led to her own flat. Though she kept her eyesaverted, she thought she could detect on the periphery of hervision that the lights of the flat downstairs from hers were lit.

Neil lived there. She couldn't remember his last name, but hewas a part-time bass-player and antiques dealer who used to giveher decorating advice she didn't want and also stole her milk -so her relationship with him had always remained at a slightlyfrosty level. Just at the moment, though, she was praying that hewas there to tell her what was wrong with her sofa, and that hislight would not go out as her eyes wavered from the pavement infront of her, with its three remaining pools of light spacedevenly along the way she had to tread.

For a moment she tried turning, and looked back the way shehad come. All was darkness, shading off into the blackness ofthe park which no longer calmed but menaced her, withhideously imagined thick, knotted roots and treacherous, dark,rotting litter.

Again she turned, sweeping her eyes low.

Three pools of light.

The street lights did not extinguish as she looked at them,only as she passed.

She squeezed her eyes closed and visualised exactly wherethe lamp of the next street light was, above and in front of her.She raised her head, and carefully opened her eyes again, staringdirectly into the orange glow radiating through the thick glass.

It shone steadily.

With her eyes locked fast on it so that it burnt squiggles onher retina, she moved cautiously forward, step by step, exertingher will on it to stay burning as she approached. It continued toglow.

She stepped forward again. It continued to glow. Again shestepped, still it glowed. Now she was almost beneath it, craningher neck to keep it in focus.

She moved forward once more, and saw the filament withinthe glass flicker and quickly die away, leaving an after-imageprancing madly in her eyes.

She dropped her eyes now and tried looking steadily forward,but wild shapes were leaping everywhere and she felt she waslosing control. The next lamp she took a lunging run towards,and again, sudden darkness enveloped her arrival. She stoppedthere panting, and blinking, trying to calm herself again and gether vision sorted out. Looking towards the last street lamp, shethought she saw a figure standing beneath it. It was a large

form,silhouetted with jumping orange shadows. Huge horns stoodupon the figure's head.

She stated with mad intensity into the billowing darkness,and suddenly screamed at it, "Who are you?"

There was a pause, and then a deep answering voice said,"Do you have anything that can get these bits of floorboard offmy back?"

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Chapter 16

There was another pause, of a different and slightly disorderedquality.

It was a long one. lt hung there nervously, wondering whichdirection it was going to get broken from. The darkened streettook on a withdrawn, defensive aspect.

“What?” Kate screamed back at the figure, at last. “I said… what?”

The great figure stirred. Kate still could not see him properlybecause her eyes were still dancing with blue shadows, searedthere by the orange light.

“1 was,” said the figure, “glued to the floor. My father - “

“Did you…are you…” Kate quivered with incoherent rage”are you responsible. . .for all this?” She turned and swept anangry hand around the street to indicate the nightmare she hadjust traversed.

“It is important that you know who I am.”

“Oh yeah?” said Kate. “Well let’s get the name down rightnow so I can take it straight to the police and get you done forbreach of something wilful or other. Intimidation. Interferingwith - “

“I am Thor. I am the God of Thunder. The God of Rain. TheGod of the High Towering Clouds. The God of Lightning. TheGod of the Flowing Currents. The God of the Particles. The Godof the Shaping and the Binding Forces. The God of the Wind.The God of the Growing Crops. The God of the HammerMjollnir.”

“Are you?” simmered Kate. “Well, I’ve no doubt that ifyou’d picked a slack moment to mention all that, I might havetaken an interest, but right now it just makes me very angry.Turn the damn lights on!”

“I am - “

“I said turn the lights on!”

With something of a sheepish glow, the streetlights all cameback on, and the windows of the houses all quietly illuminatedthemselves once more. The lamp above Kate popped againalmost immediately. She shot him a warning look.

“It was an old light, and infirm,” he said.

She simply continued to glare at him.

“See,” he said, “I have your address.” He held out the pieceof paper she had given him at the airport, as if that somehowexplained everything and put the world to rights.

“I - “

“Back!” he shouted, throwing up his arms in front of his face.

“What?”

With a huge rush of wind a swooping eagle dropped from outof the night sky, with its talons outspread to catch at him. Thorbeat and thrashed at it until the great bird flailed backwards,turned, nearly crashed to the ground, recovered itself, and withgreat slow beats of its wings, heaved itself back up through theair and perched on top of the street lamp. It grasped the lamphard with its talons and steadied itself, making the wholelamppost quiver very slightly in its grip.

“Go!” shouted Thor at it.

The eagle sat there and peered down at him. A monstrouscreature made more monstrous by the effect of the orange lighton which it perched, casting huge, flapping shadows on thenearby houses, it had strange circular markings on its wings.These were markings that Kate wondered if she had seen before,only in a nightmare, but then again, she was by no means certainthat she was not in a nightmare now.

There was no doubt that she had found the man she waslooking for. The same huge form, the same glacial eyes, thesame look of arrogant exasperation and slight muddle, only thistime his feet were plunged into huge hide boots, great furs,straps and thongs hung from his shoulders, a huge steel hornedhelmet stood on his head, and his exasperation was directed thistime not at an airline check-in girl but at a huge eagle perchedon a lamppost in the middle of Primrose Hill.

“Go,” he shouted at it again. “The matter is beyond mypower! All that I can do I have done! Your family is providedfor. You I can do nothing more for! I myself am powerless andsick.”

Kate was suddenly shocked to see that there were greatgouges on the big man’s left forearm where the eagle had got itstalons into him and ripped them through his skin. Blood waswelling up out of them like bread out of a baking tin.

“Go!” he shouted again. With the edge of one hand hescraped the blood off his other arm and flung the heavy drops atthe eagle, which reared back, flapping, but retained its hold.Suddenly the man leapt high into the air and grappled himself tothe top of the lamppost, which now began to shake dangerouslyunder their combined weight. With loud cries the eagle peckedviciously at him while he tried with great swings of his free armto sweep it from its perch.

A door opened. It was the front door of Kate’s house and aman with grey-rimmed spectacles and a neat moustache lookedout. It was Neil, Kate’s downstairs neighbour, in a mood.

“Look, I really think - ” he started. However, it quicklybecame clear that he simply didn’t know what to think andretreated back indoors, taking his mood, unsatisfied, with him.

The big man braced himself, and with a huge leap hurledhimself through the air and landed with a slight, controlledwobble on top of the next lamppost, which bent slightly underhis weight. He crouched, glaring at the eagle, which glared back.

“Go!” he shouted again, brandishing his arm at it.

“Gaarh!” it screeched back at him.

With another swing of his arm he pulled from under his furs agreat short-handled sledge-hammer and hefted its great weightmeaningfully from one hand to another. The head of the hammerwas a roughly cast piece of iron about the size and shape of apint of beer in a big glass mug, and its shaft was a stocky, wrist-thick piece of ancient oak with leather strapping bound about itshandle.

“Gaaaarrrh!” screeched the eagle again, but regarded thesledgehammer with keen-eyed suspicion. As Thor began slowlyto swing the hammer, the eagle shifted its weight tensely fromone leg to the other, in time to the rhythm of the swings.

“Go!” said Thor again, more, quietly, but with greatermenace. He rose to his full height on top of the lamppost, andswung the hammer faster and faster in a great circle. Suddenlyhe hurled it directly towards the eagle. In the same instant a boltof high voltage electricity erupted from the lamp on which theeagle was sitting, causing it to leap with loud cries wildly intothe air. The hammer sailed harmlessly under the lamp, swung upinto the air and out over the darkness of the park, while Thor,released of its weight, wobbled and tottered on top of hislamppost, spun round and regained his balance. Flailing madlyat the air with its huge wings, the eagle, too, regained control ofitself, flew upwards, made one last diving attack on Thor, whichthe god leapt backwards off the lamppost to avoid, and thenclimbed up and away into the night sky in which it quicklybecame a small, dark speck, and then at last was gone.

The hammer came bounding back from out of the sky,scraped flying sparks from the paving-stones with its head,turned over twice in the air and then dropped its head back to theground next to Kate and nested its shaft gently against her leg.

An elderly lady who had been waiting patiently with her dogin the shadows beneath the street lamp, which was now defunct,sensed, correctly, that all of the excitement was now over andproceeded quietly past them. Thor waited politely till they

hadpassed and then approached Kate, who stood with her armsfolded watching him. After all the business of the last two orthree minutes he seemed suddenly not to have the faintest ideawhat to say and for the moment merely gazed thoughtfully intothe middle distance.

Kate formed the distinct impression that thinking was, forhim, a separate activity from everything else, a task that neededits own space. It could not easily be combined with otheractivities such as walking or talking or buying airline tickets.

"We'd better take a look at your arm," she said, and led theway up the steps to her house. He followed, docile.

As she opened the front door she found Neil in the hallleaning his back against the wall and looking with grimpointedness at a Coca-Cola vending machine standing againstthe opposite wall and taking up an inordinate amount of space inthe hallway.

"I don't know what we're going to do about this, I reallydon't," he said.

"What's it doing there?" asked Kate.

"Well, that's what I'm asking you, I'm afraid," said Neil. "Idon't know how you're going to get it up the stairs. Don't seehow it can be done to be perfectly frank with you. And let's faceit, I don't think you're going to like it once you've got it upthere. I know it's very modern and American, but think about it,you've got that nice French cherrywood table, that sofa whichwill be very nice once you've taken off that dreadful CollierCampbell covering like I keep on saying you should, only youwon't listen, and I just don't see that it's going to fit in, not ineither sense. And I'm not even sure that I should allow it, I meanit's a very heavy object and you know what I've said to youabout the floors in this house. I'd think again, I really would,you know."

"Yes, Neil, how did it get here?"

"Well, your friend here delivered it just an hour or so ago. Idon't know where he's been working out, but I must say Iwouldn't mind paying his gym a visit. I said I thought the wholething was very doubtful but he would insist and in the end I evenhad to give him a hand. But I must say that I think we need tohave a very serious think about the whole topic. I asked yourfriend if he liked Wagner but he didn't respond very well. So, Idon't know, what do you want to do about it?"

Kate took a deep breath. She suggested to her huge guest thathe carry on upstairs and she would see him in just a moment.Thor lumbered past, and was an absurd figure mounting thestairs.

Neil watched Kate's eyes very closely for a clue as to what,exactly, was going on, but Kate was as blank as she knew how.

"I'm sorry, Neil," she said, matter-of-factly. "The Cokemachine will go. It's all a misunderstanding. I'll get this sortedout by tomorrow."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Neil, "but where does all thisleave me? I mean, you see my problem."

"No, Neil, I don't."

"Well, I've got this…thing out here, you've got that… personupstairs, and the whole thing is just a total disruption."

"Is there anything I can do to make anything any better?"

"Well it's not as easy as that, is it? I mean, I think you shouldjust think about it a bit, that's all. I mean, all this. You told meyou were going away. I heard the bath running this afternoon.What was I to think? And after you had gone on about the cat,and you know I won't work with cats."

"I know; Neil. That's why I asked Mrs Grey next door to lookafter her."

"Yes, and look what happened to her. Died of a heart attack.Mr Grey's very upset, you know."

"I don't think it had anything to do with me asking her if shewould look after my cat."

"Well, all I can say is that he's very upset."

"Yes, Neil. His wife's died."

"Well, I'm not saying anything. I'm just saying I think youshould think about it. And what on earth are we going to doabout all this?" he added, re-addressing his attention to theCoca-Cola machine.

"I've said that I will make sure it's gone in the morningNeil," said Kate. "I'm quite happy to stand here and scream veryloudly if you think it will help in any way, but - "

"Listen, love, I'm only making the point. And I hope you'renot going to be making a lot of noise up there because I've gotto practise my music tonight, and you know that I need quiet toconcentrate." He gave Kate a meaningful look over the top ofhis glasses and disappeared into his flat.

Kate stood and silently counted as much of one to ten as shecould currently remember and then headed staunchly up thestairs in the wake of the God of Thunder, feeling that she wasnot in a mood for either weather or theology. The house beganto throb and shake to the sound of the main theme of The Ride ofthe Valkyries being played on a Fender Precision bass.

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Chapter 17

As Dirk edged his way along the Euston Road, caught in themiddle of a rush hour traffic jam that had started in the latenineteen seventies and which, at a quarter to ten on thisThursday evening, still showed no signs of abating, he thoughthe caught sight of something he recognised.

It was his subconscious which told him this - that infuriatingpart of a person's brain which never responds to interrogationmerely gives little meaningful nudges and then sits hummingquietly to itself, saying nothing.

"Well of course I've just seen something I recognise," Dirkmuttered mentally to his subconscious. "I drive along thisbenighted thoroughfare twenty times a month. I expect Irecognise every single matchstick lying in the gutter. Can't yoube a little more specific?" His subconscious would not behectored though, and was dumb. It had nothing further to add.The city was probably full of grey vans anyway. Veryunremarkable.

"Where?" muttered Dirk to himself fiercely, twisting round inhis seat this way and that. "Where did I see a grey van?"

Nothing.

He was thoroughly hemmed in by the traffic and could notmanoeuvre in any direction, least of all forward. He eruptedfrom his car and started to jostle his way back through thejammed cars bobbing up and down to try and see where, ifanywhere, he might have caught a glimpse of a grey van. If hehad seen one, it eluded him now. His subconscious sat and saidnothing.

The traffic was still not moving, so he tried to thread his wayfurther back, but was obstructed by a large motorcycle courieredging his way forward on a huge grimy Kawasaki. Dirkengaged in a brief altercation with the courier, but lost it becausethe courier was unable to hear Dirk's side of the altercation;eventually Dirk retreated through the tide of traffic which nowwas beginning slowly to move in all lanes other than the one inwhich his car sat, driverless, immobile and hooted at.

He felt suddenly elated by the braying of the motor horns,and as he swayed and bobbed his way back through the snarledup columns of cars, he suddenly found that he reminded himselfof the crazies he had seen on the streets of New York, whowould career out into the road to explain to the oncoming trafficabout the Day of Judgement, imminent alien invasions and in-competence and corruption in the Pentagon. He put his

handsabove his head and started to shout out, “The Gods are walkingthe Earth! The Gods are walking the Earth!”

This further inflamed the feelings of those who were beepingtheir horns at his stationary car, and quickly the whole rosethrough a crescendo of majestic cacophony, with Dirk’s voiceringing out above it.

“‘The Gods are walking the Earth! The Gods are walking theEarth!” he hollered. “The Gods are walking the Earth ! Thankyou!” he added, and ducked down into his car, put it into Driveand pulled away, allowing the whole jammed mass at last toseethe easily forward.

He wondered why he was so sure. An “Act of God”. Merety achance, careless phrase by which people were able to disposeconveniently of awkward phenomena that would admit of nomore rational explanation. But it was the chance carelessness ofit which particularly appealed to Dirk because words used carelessly, as if they did not matter in any serious way, often allowedotherwise well-guarded truths to seep through.

Ao inexplicable disappearance. Oslo and a hammer: a tiny,tiny coincidence which struck a tiny, tiny note. However, it wasa note which sang in the midst of the daily hubbub of whitenoise, and other tiny notes were singing at the same pitch. AnAct of God, Oslo, and a hammer. A man with a hammer, tryingto go to Norway, is prevented, loses his temper, and as a resultthere is an “Act of God”.

If, thought Dirk, if a being were immortal he would still bealive today. That, quite simply, was what “immortal” meant.

How would an immortal being have a passport?

Quite simpty, how? Dirk tried to imagine what might happenif - to pick a name quite at random - the God Thor, he of theNorwegian ancestry and the great hammer, were to arrive at thepassport office and try to explain who he was and how come hehad no birth certificate. There would be no shock, no horror, noloud exclamations of astonishment, just blank, bureaucraticimpossibility. It wouldn’t be a matter of whether anybodybelieved him or not, it would simply be a question of producinga valid birth certificate. He coutd stand there wreaking miraclesall day if he liked but at close of business, if he didn’t have avalid birth certificate, he would simply be asked to leave.

And credit cards.

If, to sustain for a moment the same arbitrary hypothesis, theGod Thor were alive and for some reason at large in England,then he would probably be the only person in the country whodid not receive the constant barrage of invitations to

apply for anAmerican Express card, crude threats by the same post to taketheir American Express cards away, and gift catalogues full ofsumptuously unpleasant things, lavishly tooled in naff brownplastic.

Dirk found the idea quite breathtaking.

That is, if he were the only god at large - which, once youwere to accept the first extravagant hypothesis, was hardly likelyto be the case.

But imagine for a moment such a person attempting to leavethe country, armed with no passport, no credit cards, merely thepower to throw thunderbolts and who knew what else. Youwould probably have to imagine a scene very similar to the onethat did in fact occur at Terminal Two, Heathrow.

But why, if you were a Norse god, would you be needing toleave the country by means of a scheduled airline? Surely therewere other means? Dirk rather thought that one of the perks ofbeing an immortal divine might be the ability to fly under yourown power. From what he remembered of his reading of theNorse legends many years ago, the gods were continually flyingall over the place and there was never any mention of themhanging around in departure lounges eating crummy buns.Admittedly, the world was not, in those days, bristling with air-traffic controllers, radar, missile warning systems and such like.Still, a quick hop across the North Sea shouldn't be that much ofa problem for a god, particularly if the weather was in yourfavour, which, if you were the God of Thunder, you wouldpretty much expect it to be, or want to know the reason why.Should it?

Another tiny note sang in the back of Dirk's mind and thenwas lost in the hubbub.

He wondered for a moment what it was like to be a whale.Physically, he thought, he was probably well placed to get somegood insights, though whales were better adapted for their livesof gliding about in the vast pelagic blueness than he was for hisof struggling up through the Pentonville Road traffic in a wearyold Jaguar - but what he was thinking of, in fact, was thewhales' songs. In the past the whales had been able to sing toeach other across whole oceans, even from one ocean to anotherbecause sound travels such huge distances underwater. But now,again because of the way in which sound travels, there is no partof the ocean that is not constantly jangling with the hubbub ofships' motors, through which it is now virtually impossible forthe whales to hear each other's songs or messages.

So fucking what, is pretty much the way that people tend

toview this problem, and understandably so, thought Dirk. Afterall, who wants to hear a bunch of fat fish, oh all right, mammals,burping at each other?

But for a moment Dirk had a sense of infinite loss andsadness that somewhere amongst the frenzy of information noisethat daily rattled the lives of men he thought he might haveheard a few notes that denoted the movements of gods.

As he turned north into Islington and began the long haul uppast the pizza restaurants and estate agents, he felt almost franticat the idea of what their lives must now be like.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 18

Thin fingers of lightning spread out across the heavy undersideof the great clouds which hung from the sky like a saggingstomach. A small crack of fretful thunder nagged at it anddragged from it a few mean drops of greasy drizzle.

Beneath the sky ranged a vast assortment of wild turrets,gnarled spires and pinnacles which prodded at it, goaded andinflamed it till it seemed it would burst and drown them in aflood of festering horrors.

High in the flickering darkness, silent figures stood guardbehind long shields, dragons crouched gaping at the foul sky asOdin, father of the Gods of Asgard, approached the great ironportals through which led to his domain and on into the vaultedhalls of Valhalla: The air was full of the noiseless howls of greatwinged dogs, welcoming their master to the seat of his rule.Lightning searched among the towers and turrets.

The great, ancient and immortal God of Asgard was returningto the current site of his domain in a manner that would havesurprised even him centuries ago in the years of the prime of hislife - for even the immortal gods have their primes, when theirpowers are rampant and they both nourish and hold sway overthe world of men, the world whose needs give them birth - hewas returning in a large, unmarked grey Mercedes van.

The van drew to a halt in a secluded area.

The cab door opened and there climbed down from it a dull,slow-faced man in an unmarked grey uniform. He was a manwho was charged with the work he did in life because he wasnot one to ask questions - not so much on account of any naturalquality of discretion as because he simply could never think ofany questions to ask. Moving with a slow, rolling gait, like apaddle being pulled through porridge, he made his way to therear of the van and opened the rear doors - an elaborateprocedune involving the co-ordinated manipulation of manysliders and levers.

At length the doors swung open, and if Kate had been presentshe might for a moment have been jolted by the thought thatperhaps the van was carrying Albanian electricity after all. Ahaze of light greeted Hillow - the man’s. name was Hillow - butnothing about this struck him as odd. A haze of light was simplywhat he expected to see whenever he opened this door. The firsttime ever he had opened it he had simply thought to himself,”Oh. A haze of light. Oh well,” and more or less Ieft it at

that, onthe strength of which he had guaranteed himself regularemployment for as long as he cared to live.

The haze of light subsided and coalesced into the shape of anold, old man in a trolley bed attended by a short little figurewhom HiIlow would probably have thought was the most evil-looking person he had ever seen if he had had a mind to recallthe other people he had seen in his life and run through them allone by one, making the comparison. That, however, was harderthan Hillow wished to work. His only concern at present was toassist the small figure with the decanting of the old man's bed onto ground leveI.

This was fluently achieved. The legs and wheels of the bedwere a miracle of smoothly operating stainless steel technology.They unlocked, rolled, swivelled, in elaborately interlockedmovements which made the negotiating of steps or bumps allpart of the same fluid, gliding motion.

To the right of this area lay a large ante-chamber panelled infinely carved wood with great marble torch holders standingproudly from the walls. This in turn led into the great vaultedhall itself. To the left, however, lay the entrance to the majesticinner chambers where Odin would go to prepare himself for theencounters of the night.

He hated all this. Hounded from his bed, he muttered tohimself, though in truth he was bringing his bed with him. Madeto listen once again to all kinds of self indulgent clap-trap fromhis bone-headed thunderous son who would not accept, couldnot accept, simply did not have the intelligence to accept thenew realities of life. If he would not accept them then he must beextinguished, and tonight Asgard would see the extinction of animmortal god. It was all, thought Odin fractiously, too much forsomeone at his time of life, which was extremely advanced, butnot in any particular direction.

He wanted merely to stay in his hospital, which he loved. Thearrangement which had brought him to that place was of thesweetest kind and though it was not without its cost, it was acost that simply had to be borne and that was all there was to it.There were new realities, and he had learned to embrace them.Those who did not would simply have to suffer theconsequences. Nothing came of nothing, even for a god.

Aher tonight he could return to his life in the Woodsheadindefinitely, and that would be good. He said as much to Hillow.

"Clean white sheets," he said to Hillow, who merely nodded,blankly. "Linen sheets. Every day, clean sheets."

Hillow manoeuvred the bed arnund and up a step.

“Being a god, Hillow,” continued Odin, “being a god, well, itwas unclean, you hear what I’m saying? There was no one whotook care of the sheets. I mean really took care of them. Wouldyou think that? In a situation like mine? Father of the Gods?There was no one, absolutely no one, who came in and said, `MrOdwin,’” - he chuckled to himself - “they call me Mr Odwinthere, you know. They don’t quite know who they’re dealingwith. I don’t think they could handle it, do you, Hillow? Butthere was no one in all that time who came in and said, `MrOdwin, I have changed your bed and you have clean sheets.’ Noone. There was constant talk about hewing things and ravagingthings and splitting things asunder. Lots of big talk of thingsbeing mighty, and of things being riven, and of things being inthrall to other things, but very little attention given, as I nowrealise, to the laundry. Let me give you an example…”

His reminiscences were for a moment interrupted, however,by the arrival of his vehicle at a great doorway which wasguarded by a great sweaty splodge of a being who stoodswaying, arms akimbo, in their path. Toe Rag, who had beenpreserving an intense silence as he stalked along just ahead ofthe bed, hurried forward and had a quick word with the sweatingcreature, who had to bend, red-faced, to hear him. Then instantlythe sweaty creature shrank back with glistening obsequiousnessinto its yellow lair, and the sacred trolley rolled forward into thegreat halls, chambers and corridors from which great gustyechoes roared and fetid odours blew.

“Let me give you an example, Hillow,” continued Odin.”Take this place for example. Take Valhalla. . .”

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Turning north was a manoeuvre which normally had the effectof restoring a sense of reason and sanity to things, but Dirkcould not escape a sense of foreboding.

Furthermore it came on to rain a little, which should havehelped, but it was such mean and wretched rain to come fromsuch a heavy sky that it only increased the sense ofclaustrophobia and frustration which gripped the night. Dirkturned on the car wipers which grumbled because they didn'thave quite enough rain to wipe away, so he turned them offagain. Rain quickly speckled the windscreen.

He turned on the wipers again, but they still refused to feelthat the exercise was worthwhile, and scraped and squeaked inprotest. The streets turned treacherously slippery.

Dirk shook his head. He was being quite absurd, he toldhimself, in the worst possible way. He had allowed himself tobecome fanciful in a manner that he quite despised. Heastounded himself at the wild fantasies he had built on theflimsiest amount of, well he would hardly call it evidence, mereconjecture.

An accident at an airport. Probably a simple explanation.

A man with a hammer. So what?

A grey van which Kate Schechter had seen at the hospital.Nothing unusual about that. Dirk had nearly collided with it, butagain, that was a perfectly commonplace occurrence.

A Coca-Cola machine: he hadn't taken that into account.

Where did a Coca-Cola machine fit into these wild notionsabout ancient gods? The only idea he had about that was simplytoo ridiculous for words and he refused even to acknowledge itto himself.

At that point Dirk found himself driving past the housewhere, that very moming, he had encountered a client of hiswho had had his severed head placed on a revolving recordturntable by a green-eyed devil-figure waving a scythe and ablood-signed contract who had then vanished into thin air.

He peered at it as he passed, and when a large dark-blueBMW pulled out from the kerb just ahead of him he ran straightinto the back of it, and for the second time that day he had toleap out of his car, already shouting.

"For God's sake can't you look where you're going?" heexclaimed, in the hope of bagging his adversary's best linesfrom the outset. "Stupid people!" he continued, without

pausingfor breath. “Careering all over the place. Driving without duecare and attention! Reckless assault!” Confuse your enemy, hethought. lt was a little like phoning somebody up, and saying”Yes? Hello?” in a testy voice when they answered, which wasone of Dirk’s favourite methods of whiling away long, hotsummer afternoons. He bent down and examined the palpabledent in the rear of the BMW, which was quite obviously, damnit, a brand new one. Blast and bugger it, thought Dirk.

“Look what you’ve done to my bumper!” he cried. “I hopeyou have a good lawyer!”

“I am a good lawyer,” said a quiet voice which was followedby a quiet click. Dirk looked up in momentary apprehension.The quiet click was only the sound of the car door closing.

The man was wearing an Italian suit, which was also quiet.He had quiet glasses, quietly cut hair, and though a bow-tie isnot, by its very nature, a quiet object, the particular bow-tie hewore was, nevertheless, a very quietly spotted example of thegenre. He drew a slim wallet from his pocket and also a slimsilver pencil. He walked without fuss to the rear of Dirk’s Jaguarand made a note of the registration number.

“Do you have a card?” he enquired as he did so, withoutlooking up. “Here’s mine,” he added, taking one from his wallet.He made a note on the back of it. “My registration number,” hesaid, “and the name of my insurance company. Perhaps youwould be good enough to let me have the name of yours. If youdon’t have it with you, I’ll got my girl to call you.”

Dirk sighed, and decided there was no point in putting up afight on this one. He fished out his wallet and leafed through thevarious business cards that seemed to accumulate in it as if fromnowhere. He toyed for a second with the idea of being WesleyArlott, an ocean-going yacht navigation consultant from,apparently, Arkansas, but then thought better of it. The man had,after all, taken his registration number, and although Dirk had noparticular recollection of paying an insurance premium of late,he also had no particular recollection of not paying one either,which was a reasonably promising sign. He handed over a bona-fide card with a wince. The man looked at it.

“Mr Gently,” he said. “Private investigator. I’m sony, privateholistic investigator. OK.”

He put the card away, taking no further interest.

Dirk had never felt so patronised in his life. At that momentthere was another quiet click from the other side of the car. Dirklooked across to see a woman with red spectacles

standing theregiving him a frozen half smile. She was the woman he hadspoken with over Geoffrey Anstey's garden wall this morning,and the man, Dirk therefore supposed, was probably herhusband. He wondered for a second whether he should wrestlethem to the ground and question them rigorously and violently,but he was suddenly feeling immensely tired and run down.

He acknowledged the woman in red spectacles with a minuteinclination of his head.

"All done, Cynthia," said the man and flicked a smile on andoff at her. "It's all taken care of."

She nodded faintly, and the two of them climbed back intotheir BMW and after a moment or two pulled away without fussand disappeared away down the road. Dirk looked at the card inhis hand. Clive Draycott. He was with a good firm of Citysolicitors. Dirk stuck the card away in his wallet, climbeddespondently back into his car, and drove on back to his house,where he found a large golden eagle sitting patiently on hisdoorstep.

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Kate rounded on her guest as soon as they were both inside herflat with the door closed and Kate could be reasonably certainthat Neil wasn't going to sneak back out of his flat and lurk dis-approvingly half way up the stairs. The continuing thumping ofhis bass was at least her guarantee of privacy.

"All right," she said fiercely, "so what is the deal with theeagle then? What is the deal with all the street lights? Huh?"

The Norse God of Thunder looked at her awkwardly. He hadto remove his great horned helmet because it was bangingagainst the ceiling and leaving scratch marks in the plaster. Hetucked it under his arm.

"What is the deal," continued Kate, "with the Coca-Colamachine? What is the deal with the hammer? What, in short, isthe big deal? Huh?"

Thor said nothing. He frowned for a second in arrogantirritation, then frowned in something that looked somewhat likeembarrassment, and then simply stood there and bled at her.

For a few seconds she resisted the impending internalcollapse of her attitude, and then realised it was just going to goto hell anyway so she might as well go with it.

"OK," she muttered, "let's get all that cleaned up. I'll findsome antiseptic."

She went to rummage in the kitchen cupboard and returnedwith a bottle to find Thor saying "No" at her.

"No what?" she said crossly, putting the bottle down on thetable with a bit of a bang.

"That," said Thor, and pushed the bottle back at her. "No."

"What's the matter with it?"

Thor just shrugged and stared moodily at a corner of theroom. There was nothing that could be considered remotelyinteresting in that comer of the room, so he was clearly lookingat it out of sheer bloody-mindedness.

"Look, buster," said Kate, "if I can call you buster, what - "

"Thor," said Thor, "God of - "

"Yes," said Kate, "you've told me all the things you're Godof. I'm trying to clean up your arm."

"Sedra," said Thor, holding his bleeding arm out, but awayfrom her. He peered at it anxiously.

"What?"

"Crushed leaves of sedra. Oil of the kernel of the

apricot.Infusion of bitter orange blossom. Oil of almonds. Sage andcomfrey. Not this."

He pushed the bottle of antiseptic off the table and sank into amood.

"Right!" said Kate, picked up the bottle and hurled it at him.It rebounded off his cheekbone leaving an instant red mark.Thor lunged forward in a rage, but Kate simply stood her groundwith a finger pointed at him.

"You stay right there, buster!" she said, and he stopped."Anything special you need for that?"

Thor looked puzzled for a moment.

"That!" said Kate, pointing at the blossoming bruise on hischeek.

"Vengeance," said Thor.

"I'll have to see what I can do," said Kate. She turned on herheel and stalked out of the room.

Aher about two minutes of unseen activity Kate returned tothe room, trailed by wisps of steam.

"All right," she said, "come with me."

She led him into her bathroom. He followed her with a greatshow of reluctance, but he followed her. Kate had been trailedby wisps of steam because the bathroom was full of it. The bathitself was overflowing with bubbles and gunk.

There were some bottles and pots, mostly empty, lined upalong a small shelf above the bath. Kate picked them up one byone and displayed them at him.

"Apricot kernel oil," she said, and turned it upside down toemphasise its emptiness. "All in there," she added, pointing atthe foaming bath.

"Neroli oil," she said, picking up the next one, "distilled fromthe blossom of bitter oranges. All in there."

She picked up the next one. "Orange cream bath oil. Containsalmond oil. All in there."

She picked up the pots.

"Sage and comfrey," she said of one, "and sedra oil. One ofthem's a hand cream and the other's hair conditioner, but they'reall in there, along with a tube of Aloe Lip Preserver, someCucumber Cleansing Milk, Honeyed Beeswax and Jojoba OilCleanser, Rhassoul Mud, Seaweed and Birch Shampoo, RichNight Cream with Vitamin E, and a very great deal of cod liveroil. I'm afraid I haven't got anything called `Vengeance', buthere's some Calvin Klein `Obsession'."

She took the stopper from a bottle of perfume and threw thebottle in the bath:

“I’ll be in the next room when you’re done.”·

With that she marched out, and slammed the door on him.She waited in the other room, firmly reading a book.

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Chapter 21

For about a minute Dirk remained sitting motionless in his car afew yards away from his front door. He wondered what his nextmove should be. A small, cautious one, he rather thought. Thelast thing he wanted to have to contend with at the moment wasa startled eagle.

He watched it intently. It stood there with a pert magnificenceabout its bearing, its talons gripped tightly round the edge of thestone step. From time to time it preened itself, and then peeredsharply up the street and down the street, dragging one of itsgreat talons across the stone in a deeply worrying manner. Dirkadmired the creature greatly for its size and its plumage and itsgeneral sense of extreme air-worthiness, but, asking himself ifhe liked the way that the light from the street lamp glinted in itsgreat glassy eye or on the huge hook of its beak, he had to admitthat he did not.

The beak was a major piece of armoury.

It was a beak that would frighten any animal on earth, evenone that was already dead and in a tin. Its talons looked as ifthey could rip up a small Volvo. And it was sitting waiting onDirk's doorstep, looking up and down the street with a gaze thatwas at once meaningful and mean.

Dirk wondered if he should simply drive off and leave thecountry. Did he have his passport? No. It was at home. It wasbehind the door which was behind the eagle, in a drawersomewhere or, more likely, lost.

He could sell up. The ratio of estate agents to actual houses inthe area was rapidly approaching parity. One of their lot couldcome and deal with the house. He'd had enough of it, with itsfridges and its wildlife and its ineradicable position on themailing lists of the American Express company.

Or he could, he supposed with a slight shiver, just go and seewhat it was the eagle wanted. There was a thought. Rats,probably, or a small whippet. All Dirk had, to his knowledge,was some Rice Krispies and an old muffin, and he didn't seethose appealing to this magisterial creature of the air. He ratherfancied that he could make out fresh blood congealing on thebird's talons, but he told himself firmly not to be so ridiculous.

He was just going to have to go and face up to the thing,explain that he was fresh out of rats and take the consequences.

Quietly, infinitely quietly, he pushed open the door of his car,and stole out of it, keeping his head down. He peered at it fromover the bonnet of the car. It hadn't moved. That is to say, ithadn't left the district. It was still looking this way and thataround itself with, possibly, a heightened sense of alertness.Dirk didn't know in what remote mountain eyrie the creaturehad learnt to listen out for the sound of Jaguar car door hingesrevolving in their sockets, but the sound had clearly not escapedits attention.

Cautiously, Dirk bobbed along behind the line of cars thathad prevented him from being able to park directly outside hisown house. In a couple of seconds all that separated him fromthe extraordinary creature was a small, blue Renault.

What next?

He could simply stand up and, as it were, declare himself. Hewould be saying, in effect, "Here I am, do what you will." What-ever then transpired, the Renault could probably bear the brunt.

There was always the possibility, of course, that the eaglewould be pleased to see him, that all this swooping it had beendirecting at him had been just its way of being matey.Assuming, of course, that it was the same eagle. That was notsuch an enormous assumption. The number of golden eagles atlarge in North London at any one time was, Dirk guessed, fairlysmall.

Or maybe it was just nesting on his doorstep completely bychance, enjoying a quick breather prior to having another hurtlethrough the sky in pursuit of whatever it is that eagles hurtlethrough the sky after.

Whatever the explanation, now, Dirk realised, was the timethat he had simply to take his chances. He steeled himself, tooka deep breath and arose from behind the Renault, like a spiritrising from the deep.

The eagle was looking in another direction at the time, and itwas a second or so before it looked back to the front and sawhim, at which point it reacted with a loud screech and steppedback an inch or two, a reaction which Dirk felt a little put out by.It then blinked rapidly a few times and adopted a sort of perkyexpression of which Dirk did not have the faintest idea what tomake.

He waited for a second or two, until he felt the situation hadsettled down again after all the foregoing excitement, and thenstopped forward tentatively, round the front of the Renault. Anumber of quiet, interrogative cawing noises seemed to

floatuncertainly through the air, and then after a moment Dirkrealised that he was making them himself and made himselfstop. This was an eagle he was dealing with, not a budgie.

It was at this point that he made his mistake.

With his mind entirely taken up with eagles, the possibleintentions of eagles, and the many ways in which eagles mightbe considercd to differ from small kittens, he did not concentrateenough on what he was doing as he stepped up out of the roadand on to a pavement that was slick with the recent drizzle. Ashe brought his rear foot forward it caught on the bumper of thecar he wobbled, slipped, and then did that thing which oneshould never do to a large eagle of uncertain temper, which wasto fling himself headlong at it with his arms outstretched.

The eagle reacted instantly.

Without a second's hesitation it hopped neatly aside andallowed Dirk the space he needed to collapse heavily on to hisown doorstep. It then peered down at him with a scorn thatwould have withered a lesser man, or at least a man that hadbeen looking up at that moment.

Dirk groaned.

He had sustained a blow to the temple from the edge of thestep, and it was a blow, he felt, that he could just as easily havedone without this evening. He lay there gasping for a second ortwo, then at last rolled over heavily, clasping one hand to hisforehead, the other to his nose, and looked up at the great bird inapprehension, reflecting bitterly on the conditions under whichhe was expected to work.

When it became clear to him that he appeared for the momentto have nothing to fear from the eagle, who was merelyregarding him with a kind of quizzical, blinking doubt, he sat up,and then slowly dragged himself back to his feet and wiped andsmaacked some of the dirt off his coat. Then he hunted throughhis pockets for his keys and unlocked the front door, whichseemed a little loose. He waited to see what the eagle would donext.

With a slight rustle of its wings it hopped over the lintel andinto his hall. It looked around itself, and seemed to regard whatit saw with a little distaste. Dirk didn't know what it was thateagles expected of people's hallways, but had to admit tohimself that it wasn't only the eagle which reacted like that. Thedisorder was not that great, but there was a grimness to it whichtended to cast a pall over visitors, and the eagle was clearly notimmune to this effect.

Dirk picked up a large flat envelope lying on his doormat,looked inside it to check that it was what he had been expecting,then noticed that a picture was missing from the wall. It wasn't aparticularly wonderful picture, merely a small Japanese printthat he had found in Camden Passage and quite liked, but thepoint was that it was missing. The hook on the wall was empty.There was a chair missing as well, he realised.

The possible significance of this suddenly struck him, and hehurried through to the kitchen. Many of his assorted kitchenimplements had clearly gone. The rack of largely unusedSabatier knives, the food processor and his radio cassette playerhad all vanished, but he did, however, have a new fridge. It hadobviously been delivered by Nobby Paxton's felonious thugsand he would just have to make the usual little list.

Still, he had a new fridge and that was a considerable load offhis mind. Already the whole atmosphere in the kitchen seemedeasier. The tension had lifted. There was a new sense oflightness and springiness in the air which had evencommunicated itself to the pile of old pizza boxes which seemednow to recline at a jaunty rather than an oppressive angle.

Dirk cheerfully threw open the door to the new fridge andwas delighted to find it completely and utterly empty. Its innerlight shone on perfectly clean blue and white walls and ongleaming chrome shelves. He liked it so much that he instantlydetermined to keep it like that. He would put nothing in it at all.His food would just have to go off in plain view.

Good. He closed it again.

A screech and a flap behind him reminded him that he wasentertaining a visiting eagle. He turned to find it glaring at himfrom on top of the kitchen table.

Now that he was getting a little more accustomed to it, andhad not actually been viciously attacked as he had suspected hemight be, it seemed a little less fearsome than it had at first. Itwas still a serious amount of eagle, but perhaps an eagle was aslightly more manageable proposition than he had originallysupposed. He relaxed a little and took off his hat, pulled off hiscoat, and threw them on to a chair.

The eagle seemed at this juncture to sense that Dirk might begetting the wrong idea about it and flexed one of its claws athim. With sudden alarm Dirk saw that it did indeed havesomething that closely resembled congealed blood on the talons.He backed away from it hurriedly. The eagle then rose up to itsfull height on its talons and began to spread its great wings out,wider and wider, beating them very slowly and leaning

forwardso as to keep its balance. Dirk did the only thing he could thinkto do under the cincumstances and bolted from the room,slamming the door behind him and jamming the hall table upagainst it.

A terrible cacophony of screeching and scratching andbuffeting arose instantly from behind it. Dirk sat leaning backagainst the table, panting and trying to catch his breath, and thenafter a while began to get a worrying feeling about what the birdwas up to now.

It seemed to him that the eagle was actually dive-bombingitself against the door. Every few seconds the pattern wouldrepeat itself - first a great beating of wings, then a rush, then aterrible cracking thud. Dirk didn't think it would get through thedoor, but was alarmed that it might beat itself to death trying.The creature seemed to be quite frantic about something, butwhat, Dirk could not even begin to imagine. He tried to calmhimself down and think clearly, to work out what he should donext.

He should phone Kate and make certain she was all right.

Whoosh, thud!

He should finally open up the envelope he had been carryingwith him all day and examine its contents.

Whoosh, thud!

For that he would need a sharp knife.

Whoosh, thud!

Three rather awkward thoughts then struck him in fairlyquick succession.

Whoosh, thud!

First, the only sharp knives in the place, assuming Nobby'sremoval people had left him with any at all, were in the kitchen.

Whoosh, thud!

That didn't matter so much in itself, because he couldprobably find something in the house that would do.

Whoosh, thud!

The second thought was that the actual envelope itself was inthe pocket of his coat which he had left lying over the back of achair in the kitchen.

Whoosh, thud!

The third thought was very similar to the second and had todo with the location of the piece of paper with Kate's telephonenumber on it.

Whoosh, thud!

Oh God.

Whoosh, thud!

Dirk began to feel very, very tired at the way the day wasworking out. He was deeply worried by the sense of impendingcalamity, but was still by no means able to divine what lay at theroot of it.

Whoosh, thud!

Well, he knew what he had to do now…

Whoosh, thud!

… so there was no point in not getting on with it. He quietlypulled the table away from the door.

Whoosh -

He ducked and yanked the door open, passing smoothlyunder the eagle as it hurtled out into the hallway and hit theopposite wall. He slammed the door closed behind him frominside the kitchen, pulled his coat off the chair and jammed thechair back up under the handle.

Whoosh, thud!

The damage done to the door on this side was bothconsiderable and impressive, and Dirk began seriously to worryabout what this behaviour said about the bird's state of mind, orwhat the bird's state of mind might become if it maintained thisbehaviour for very much longer.

Whoosh… scratch…

The same thought seemed to have occurred to the bird at thatmoment, and after a brief flurry of screeching and of scratchingat the door with its talons it lapsed into a grumpy and defeatedsilence, which after it had been going on for about a minutebecame almost as disturbing as the previous batterings.

Dirk wondered what it was up to.

He approached the door cautiously and very, very quietlymoved the chair back a little so that he could see through thekeyhole. He squatted down and peered through it. At first itseemed to him that he could see nothing through it, that it mustbe blocked by something. Then, a slight flicker and glint closeup on the other side suddenly revealed the startling truth, whichwas that the eagle also had an eye up at the keyhole and wasbusy looking back at him. Dirk almost toppled backwards withthe shock of the realisation, and backed away from the door witha sense of slight horror and revulsion.

This was extremely intelligent behaviour for an eagle wasn'tit? Was it? How could he find out? He couldn't think of any ornithological experts to phone. All his reference books were piledup in other rooms of the house, and he didn't think he'd be ableto keep on pulling off the same stunt with impunity,

certainlynot when he was dealing with an eagle which had managed tofigure out what keyholes were for.

He retrealed to the kitchen sink and found some kitchentowel. He folded it into a wad, soaked it, and dabbed it first onhis bleeding temple, which was swelling up nicely, and then onhis nose which was still very tender, and had been aconsiderable size for most of the day now. Maybe the eagle wasan eagle of delicate sensibilities and had reacted badly to thesight of Dirk's face in its current, much abused, state and hadsimply lost its mind. Dirk sighed and sat down.

Kate's telephone, which was the next thing he turned hisattention to, was answered by a machine when he tried to ring it.Her voice told him, very sweetly, that he was welcome to leavea message after the beep, but warned that she hardly everlistened to them and that it was much better to talk to herdirectly, only he couldn't because she wasn't in, so he'd best tryagain.

Thank you very much, he thought, and put the phone down.

He realised that the truth of the matter was this: he had spentthe day putting off opening the envelope because of what he wasworried about finding in it. It wasn't that the idea wasfrightening, though indeed it was frightening that a man shouldsell his soul to a green-eyed man with a scythe, which is whatcircumstances were trying very hard to suggest had happened. Itwas just that it was extremely depressing that he should sell it toa green-eyed man with a scythe in exchange for a share in theroyalties of a hit record.

That was what it looked like on the face of it. Wasn't it?

Dirk picked up the other envelope, the one which had beenwaiting for him on his doormat, delivered there by courier froma large London bookshop where Dirk had an account. He pulledout the contents, which were a copy of the sheet music of HotPototo, written by Colin Paignton, Phil Mulville and GeoffAnstey.

The lyrics were, well, straightforward. They provided a basicrepetitive bit of funk rhythm and a simple sense of menace andcheerful callousness which had caught the mood of last summer.They went:

Hot Potato,
Don't pick it up, pick it up, pick it up.
Quick, pass it on, poss it on, poss it on.
You don't want to get caught, get caught, get caught.
Drop it on someone. Who ? Who ? Anybody.
You better not have it when the big one comes.

I said you better not have it when the big one comes.

It's a Hot Potato.

And so on. The repeated phrases got tossed back and forwardbetween the two members of the band, the drum machine gotheavier and heavier, and there had been a dance video.

Was that all it was going to be? Big deal. A nice house inLupton Street with polyurethaned floors and a broken marriage?

Things had certainly come down a long way since the greatdays of Faust and Mephistopheles, when a man could gain allthe knowledge of the universe, achieve all the ambitions of hismind and all the pleasures of the flesh for the price of his soul.Now it was a few record royalties, a few pieces of trendyfurniture, a trinket to stick on your bathroom wall and, whap,your head comes off.

So what exactly was the deal? What was the Potato contract? Who was getting what and why?

Dirk rummaged through a drawer for the breadknife, satdown once more, took the envelope from his coat pocket andripped through the congealed strata of Sellotape which held theend of it together.

Out fell a thick bundle of papers.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 22

At exactly the moment that the telephone rang, the door toKate's sitting-room opened. The Thunder God attempted tostomp in through it, but in fact he wafted. He had clearly soakedhimself very thoroughly in the stuff Kate had thrown into thebath, then redressed, and torn op a nightgown of Kate's to bindhis forearm with. He casually tossed a handful of softened oakshards away into the comer of the room. Kate decided for themoment to ignore both the deliberate provocations and thetelephone. The former she could deal with and the latter she hada machine for dealing with.

"I've been reading about you," she challenged the ThunderGod. "Where's your beard?"

He took the book, a one volume encyclopaedia, from herhands and glanced at it before tossing it aside contemptuously.

"Ha," he said, "I shaved it off. When I was in Wales." Hescowled at the memory.

"What were you doing in Wales for heaven's sake?"

"Counting the stones," he said with a shrug, and went to stareout of the window.

There was a huge, moping anxiety in his bearing. It suddenlyoccurred to Kate with a spasm of something not entinely unlikefear, that sometimes when people got like that, it was becausethey had picked up their mood from the weather. With aThunder God it presumably worked the other way round. Thesky ootside certainly had a restless and disgruntled look.

Her reactions suddenly started to become very confused.

"Excuse me if this sounds like a stupid question," said Kate,"but I'm a little at sea here. I'm not used to spending the eveningwith someone who's got a whole day named after them. Whatstones were you counting in Wales?"

"All of them," said Thor in a low growl. "All of thembetween this size… " he held the tip of his forefinger and thumbabout a quarter of an inch apart, "…and this size." He held histwo hands about a yard apart, and then put them down again.

Kate stared at him blankly.

"Well… how many were thene?" she asked. It seemed onlypolite to ask.

He rounded on her angrily.

"Count them yourself if you want to know!" he shouted."What's the point in my spending years and years and yearscounting them, so that I'm the only person who knows, and

whowill ever know, if I just go and tell somebody else? Well?"

He turned back to the window.

"Anyway," he said, "I've been worried about it. I think I mayhave lost count somewhere in Mid-Glamorgan. But I'm not," heshouted, "going to do it again!"

"Well, why on earth would you do such an extraordinarything in the first place?"

"It was a burden placed on me by my father. A punishment.A penance." He glowered.

"Your father?" said Kate. "Do you mean Odin?"

"The All-Father," said Thor. "Father of the Gods of Asgard."

"And you're saying he's alive?"

Thor turned to look at her as if she was stupid.

"We are immortals," he said, simply.

Downstairs, Neil chose that moment to conclude histhunderous performance on the bass, and the house seemed tosing in its aftermath with an eerie silence.

"Immortals are what you wanted," said Thor in a low, quietvoice. "Immortals are what you got. It is a little hard on us. Youwanted us to be for ever, so we are for ever. Then you forgetabout us. But still we are for ever. Now at last, many are dead,many dying," he then added in a quiet voice, "but it takes aspecial effort."

"I can't even begin to understand what you're talking about,"said Kate, "you say that I, we - "

"You can begin to understand," said Thor, angrily, "which iswhy I have come to you. Do you know that most people hardlysee me? Hardly notice me at all? It is not that we are hidden. Weare here. We move among you. My people. Your gods. Yougave birth to us. You made us be what'you would not dare to beyourselves. Yet you will not acknowledge us. If I walk alongone of your streets in this… world you have made for yourselveswithout us, then barely an eye will once flicker in my direction."

"Is this when you're wearing the helmet?"

"Especially when I'm wearing the helmet!"

"Well- "

"You make fun of me!" roared Thor.

"You make it very easy for a girl," said Kate. "I don't knowwhat - "

Suddenly the room seemed to quake and then to catch itsbreath. All of Kate's insides wobbled violently and then heldvery still. In the sudden horrible silence, a blue china table lampslowly toppled off the table, hit the floor, and crawled off to

adark corner of the room where it sat in a worried little defensivehuddle.

Kate stared at it and tried to be calm about it. She felt as ifcold, soft jelly was trickling down her skin.

“Did you do that?” she said shakily.

Thor was looking livid and confused. He muttered, “Do notmake me angry with you. You were very lucky.” He lookedaway.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that I wish you to come with me.”

“What? What about that?” She pointed at the smallbefuddled kitten under the table which had so recently and soconfusingly been a blue china table lamp.

“There’s nothing I can do for it.”

Kate was suddenly so tired and confused and frightened thatshe found she was nearly in tears. She stood biting her lip andtrying to be as angry as she could.

“Oh yeah?” she said. “I thought you were meant to be a god. Ihope you haven’t got into my home under false pretences, I…”She stumbled to a halt, and then resumed in a different tone ofvoice.

“Do you mean,” she said, in a small voice, “that you havebeen here, in the world, all this time?”

“Here, and in Asgard,” said Thor.

“Asgard,” said Kate. “The home of the gods?”

Thor was silent. It was a grim silence that seemed to be fullof something that bothered him deeply.

“Where is Asgard?” demanded Kate.

Again Thor did not speak. He was a man of very few wordsand enormously long pauses. When at last he did answer, itwasn’t at all clear whether he had been thinking all that time orjust standing there.

“Asgard is also here,” he said. “All worlds are here.”

He drew out from under his furs his great hammer andstudied its head deeply and with an odd curiosity, as ifsomething about it was very puzzling. Kate wondered where shefound such a gesture familiar from. She found that itinstinctively made her want to duck. She stepped back veryslightly and was watchful.

When he looked up again, there was an altogether new focusand energy in his eyes, as if he was gathering himself up to hurlhimself at something. “

“Tonight I must be in Asgard,” he said. “I must confront myfather Odin in the great hall of Valhalla and bring him toaccount for what he has done.”

“You mean, for making you count Welsh pebbles?”

“No!” said Thor. “For making the Welsh pebbles not worthcounting!”

Kate shook her head in exasperation. “I simply don’t knowwhat to make of you at all,” she said. “I think I’m just too tired.Come back tomorrow. Explain it all in the morning.”

“No,” said Thor. “You must see Asgard yourself, and thenyou will understand. You must see it tonight.” He gripped her bythe arm.

“I don’t want to go to Asgard,” she insisted. “I don’t go tomythical places with strange men. You go. Call me up and tellme how it went in the morning. Give him hell about thepebbles.”

She wrested her arm from his grip. It was very, very clear toher that she only did this with his permission.

“Now please, go, and let me sleep!” She glared at him.

At that moment the house seemed to erupt as Neil launchedinto a thumping bass rendition of Siegfried’s Rheinfahrt fromAct 1 of G”tterd”mmerung, just to prove it could be done. Thewalls shook, the windows rattled. From under the table thesound of the table lamp mewing pathetically could just be heard.

Kate tried to maintain her furious glare, but it simply couldn’tbe kept up for very long in the circumstances.

“OK,” she said at last, “how do we get to this place?”

“There are as many ways as there are tiny pieces.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Tiny things.” He held up his thumb and forefinger again toindicate something very small. “Molecules,” he added, seemingto be uncomfortable with the word. “But first let us leave here.”

“Will I need a coat in Asgard?”

“As you wish.”

“Well, I’ll take one anyway. Wait a minute.”

She decided that the best way to deal with the astonishingrigmarole which currently constituted her life was to bebusinesslike about it. She found her coat, brushed her hair, left anew message on her telephone answering machine and put asaucer of milk firmly under the table.

“Right,” she said, and led the way out of the flat, locking itcarefully after them, and making shushing noises as they passedNeil’s door. For all the uproar he was currently making he wasalmost certainly listening out for the slightest sound, and wouldbe out in a moment if he heard them going by to complain

aboutthe Coca-Cola machine, the lateness of the hour, man'sinhumanity to man, the weather, the noise, and the colour ofKate's coat, which was a shade of blue that Neil for some reasondisapproved of most particularly. They stole past successfullyand closed the front door behind them with the merest click.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 23

The sheets which tumbled out on to Dirk's kitchen table weremade of thick heavy paper, folded together, and had obviouslybeen much handled.

He sorted them out, one by one, separating them from eachother, smoothing them out with the flat of his hand and layingthem out neatly in rows on the kitchen table, clearing a space, asit became necessary, among the old newspapers, ashtrays anddirty cereal bowls which Elena the cleaner always left exactlywhere they were, claiming, when challenged on this, that shethought he had put them there specially.

He pored over the papers for several minutes, moving fromone to another, comparing them with each other, studying themcarefully, page by page, paragraph by paragraph, line by line.

He couldn't understand a word of them.

It should have occurred to him, he realised, that the green-eyed, hairy, scythe-waving giant might differ from him not onlyin general appearance and personal habits, but also in suchmatters as the alphabet he favoured.

He sat back in his seat, disgruntled and thwarted, and reachedfor a cigarette, but the packet in his coat was now empty. Hepicked up a pencil and tapped it in a cigarette-like way, but itwasn't able to produce the same effect.

After a minute or two he became acutely conscious of the factthat he was probably still being watched through the keyhole bythe eagle and he found that this made it impossibly hard toconcentrate on the problem before him, particularly without acigarette. He scowled to himself. He knew there was still apacket upstairs by his bed, but he didn't think he could handlethe sheer ornithology involved in going to get it.

He tried to stare at the papers for a little longer. The writing,apart from being written in some kind of small, crabby andindecipherable runic script, was mostly hunched up towards theleft-hand side of the paper as if swept there by a tide. The right-hand side was largely clear except for an occasionai group ofcharacters which were lined up underneath each other. All of it,except for a slight sense of undefinable familiarity about thelayout, was completely meaningless to Dirk.

He turned his attention back to the envelope instead and triedonce more to examine some of the names which had been soheavily crossed out.

Howard Bell, the incredibly wealthy bestselling novelist whowrote bad books which sold by the warehouse-load despite - orperhaps because of - the fact that nobody read them.

Dennis Hutch, record company magnate. Now that he had acontext for the name, Dirk knew it perfeetly well. The AriesRising Record Group which had been founded on Sixties ideals,or at least on what passed for ideals in the Sixties, grown in theSeventies and then embraced the materialism of the Eightieswithout missing a beat, was now a massive entertainmentconglomerate on both sides of the Atlantic. Dennis Hutch hadstepped up into the top seat when its founder had died of a lethaloverdose of brick wall, taken while under the influence of aFerrari and a bottle of tequila. ARRGH! was also the recordlabel on which Hot Potato had been released.

Stan Dubcek, senior partner in the advertising company withthe silly name which now owned most of the British andAmerican advertising companies which had not had nameswhich were quite as silly, and had therefore been swallowedwhole.

And here, suddenly, was another name that was instantlyrecognisable, now that Dirk was attuned to the sort of names heshould be looking for. Roderick Mercer, the world's greatestpublisher of the world's sleaziest newspapers. Dirk hadn't atfirst spotted the name with the unfamiliar "…erick" in placeafter the "Rod". Well, well, well. . .

Now here were people, thought Dirk suddenly, who hadreally got something. Certainly they had got rather more than anice little house in Lupton Road with some dried flowers lyingaround the place. They also had the great advantage of havingheads on their shoulders as well, unless Dirk had missedsomething new and dramatic on the news. What did that allmean? What was this contract? How come everybody whosehands it had been through had been so astoundingly successfulexcept for one, Geoffrey Anstey? Everybody whose hands it hadpassed through had benefited from it except for the one who hadit last. Who had still got it.

It was a hot potato. .

You better not have it when the big one comes.

The notion suddenly formed in Dirk's mind that it might havebeen Geoffrey Anstey himself who had overheard aconversation about a hot potato, about getting rid of it, passing iton. If he remembered correctly the interview he had read withPain, he didn't say that he himself had overheard theconversation.

You better not have it when the big one comes.

The notion was a horrible one and ran on like this: GeoffreyAnstey had been pathetically nave. He had overheard thisconversation, between - who? Dirk picked up the envelope andran over the list of names - and had thought that it had a gooddance rhythm. He had not for a moment realised that what hewas listening to was a conversation that would result in his ownhideous death. He had got a hit record out of it, and when thereal hot potato was actually handed to him he had picked it up.

Don't pick it up, pick it up, pick it up.

And instead of taking the advice he had recorded in thc wordsof the song…

Quick, pass it on, pass it on, pass it on.

… he had stuck it behind the gold record award on hisbathroom wall.

You better not have it when the big one comes.

Dirk frowned and took a long, slow thoughtful drag on hispencil.

This was ridiculous.

He had to got some cigarettes if he was going to think thisthrough with any intellectual rigour. He pulled on his coat,stuffed his hat on his head and made for the window.

The window hadn't been opened for - well, certainly notduring his ownership of the house, and it struggled andscreamed at the sudden unaccustomed invasion of its space andindependence. Once he had forced it wide enough, Dirkstruggled out on to the windowsill, pulling swathes of leathercoat out with him. From here it was a bit of a jump to thepavement since there was a lower ground floor to the house witha narrow flight of steps leading down to it in the front. A line ofiron railings separated these from the pavement, and Dirk had toget clear over these.

Without hesitating for a moment he made the jump, and itwas in mid-bound that he realised he had not pickcd up his carkeys from the kitchen table where he'd left them.

He considered as he sailed gracelessly through the airwhether or not to execute a wild mid-air twist, make a desperategrab backwards for the window and hope that he might justmanage to hold on to the sill, but decided on mature reflectionthat an error at this point might just conceivably kill himwhereas the walk would probably do him good.

He landed heavily on the far side of the railings, but the tailsof his coat became entangled with them and he had to pull themoff, tearing part of the lining in the process. Once the ringingshock in

his knees had subsided and he had recovered what littlecomposure the events of the day had left him with, he realisedthat it was now well after eleven o'clock and the pubs would beshut, and he might have a longer walk than he had bargained forto find some cigarettes.

He considered what to do.

The current outlook and state of mind of tbe eagle was amajor factor to be taken into account here. The only way to gethis car keys now was back through the front door into his eagle-infested hallway.

Moving with great caution he tip-toed back up the steps to hisfront door, squatted down and, hoping that the damn thingwasn't going to squeak, gently pushed up the flap of the letter-box and peered through.

In an instant a talon was hooked into the back of his hand anda great screeching beak slashed at his eye, narrowly missing itbut scratching a great gouge across his much abused nose.

Dirk howled with pain and lurched backwards, not gettingvery far because he still had a talon hooked in his hand. Helashed out desperately and hit at the talon, which hurt himconsiderably, dug the sharp point even further into his flesh andcaused a great, barging flurry on the far side of the door, eachtiniest movement of which tugged heavily in his hand.

He grabbed at the great claw with his free hand and and tried totug it back out of himself. It was immensely strong, and wasshaking with the fury of the eagle, which was as trapped as hewas. At last, quivering with pain, he managed to release himself,and pulled his injured hand back, nursing and cuddling it withthe other.

The eagle pulled its claw back sharply, and Dirk heard itflapping away back down his hallway, emitting terriblescreeches and cries, its great wings colliding with and scrapingthc walls.

Dirk toyed with the idea of burning the house down, but oncethe throbbing in his hand had begun to subside a little he calmeddown and tried, if he could, to see things from the eagle's pointof view.

He couldn't.

He had not the faintest idea how things appeared to eagles ingeneral, much less to this particular eagle, which seemed to be aseriously deranged example of the species.

After a minute or so more of nursing his hand, curiosity-allied to a strong sense that the eagle had definitely retreated tothe far end of the hall and stayed there - overcame him, and hebent down once more to the letter-box. This time he used hispencil to

push the flap back upwards and scanned the hallwayfrom a safe position a good few inches back.

The eagle was clearly in view, perched on the end of thebannister rail, regarding him with resentment and opprobrium,which Dirk felt was a little rich coming from a creature whichhad only a moment or two ago been busily engaged in trying torip his hand off.

Then, once the eagle was certain that it had got Dirk'sattention, it slowly raised itself up on its feet and slowly shookits great wings out, beating them gently for balance. It was thisgesture that had previously caused Dirk to bolt prudently fromthe room. This time, however, he was safely behind a couple ofgood solid inches of wood and he stood, or rather, squatted hisground. The eagle stretched its neck upwards as well, jabbing itstongue out at the air and cawing plaintively, which surprisedDirk.

Then he noticed something else rather surprising about theeagle, which was that its wings had strange, un-eaglelikemarkings on them. They were large concentric circles.

The differences of coloration which delineated thc circleswere very slight, and it was only the absolute geometricregularity of them which made them stand out as clearly as theydid. Dirk had the very clear sense that the eagle was showinghim these circles, and that that was what it had wanted to attracthis attention to all along. Each time the bird had dived at him, herealised as he thought back, it had then started on a strange kindof flapping routine which had involved opening its wings rightout. However, each time it had happened Dirk had been toobusily engaged with the business of turning round and runningaway to pay this exhibition the appropriate attention.

"Have you got the money for a cup of tea, mate?"

"Er, yes thank you," said Dirk, "I'm fine." His attention wasfully occupied with the eagle, and he didn't immediately lookround.

"No, I meant can you spare me a bob or two, just for a cup oftea?"

"What?" This time Dirk looked round, irritably.

"Or just a fag, mate. Got a fag you can spare?"

"No, I was just going to go and get some myself," said Dirk.

The man on the pavement behind him was a tramp ofindeterminate age. He was standing there, slightly wobbly, witha look of wild and continuous disappointment bobbing in hiseyes.

Not getting an immediate response from Dirk, the

mandropped his eyes to the ground about a yard in front of him, andswayed back and forth a little. He was holding his arms out,slightly open, slightly away from his body, and just swaying.Then he frowned suddenly at the ground. Then he frowned atanother part of the ground. Then, holding himself steady whilehe made quite a major realignment of his head, he frowned awaydown the street.

"Have you lost something?" said Dirk.

The man's head swayed back towards him.

"Have I lost something?" he said in querulous astonishment."Have I lost something?"

It seemed to be the most astounding question he had everheard. He looked away again for a while, and seemed to betrying to balance the question in the general scale of things. Thisinvolved a fair bit more swaying and a fair few more frowns. Atlast he seemed to come up with something that might do serviceas some kind of answer.

"The sky?" he said, challenging Dirk to find this a goodenough answer. He looked up towards it, carefully, so as not tolose his balance. He seemed not to like what he saw in the dim,orange, street-lit pallor of the clouds, and slowly looked backdown again till he was staring at a point just in front of his feet.

"The ground?" he said, with evident great dissatisfaction, andthen was struck with a sudden thought.

"Frogs?" he said, wobbling his gaze up to meet Dirk's ratherbewildered one. "I used to like…frogs," he said, and left hisgaze sitting on Dirk as if that was all he had to say, and the restwas entirely up to Dirk now.

Dirk was completely flummoxed. He longed for the timeswhen life had been easy, life had been carefree, the great timeshe'd had with a mere homicidal eagle, which seemed now to besuch an easygoing and amiable companion. Aerial attack hecould cope with, but not this nameless roaring guilt that camehowling at him out of nowhere.

"What do you want?" he said in a strangled voice.

"Just a fag, mate," said the tramp, "or something for a cup oftea."

Dirk pressed a pound coin into the man's hand and lunged offdown the street in a panic, passing, twenty yards further on, abuilder's skip from which the shape of his old fridge loomed athim menacingly.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 24

As Kate came down the steps from her house she noticed thatthe temperature had dropped considerably. The clouds satheavily on the land and loured at it. Thor set off briskly in thedirection of the park, and Kate trotted along in his wake.

As he strode along, an extraordinary figure on the streets ofPrimrose Hill, Kate could not help but notice that he had beenright. They passed three different people on the way, and shesaw distinctly how their eyes avoided looking at him, even asthey had to make allowance for his great bulk as he passed them.He was not invisible, far from it. He simply didn't fit.

The park was closed for the night, but Thor leapt quickly overthe spiked railings and then lifted her over in turn as lightly as ifshe had been a bunch of flowers.

The grass was damp and mushy, but still worked its magic oncity feet. Kate did what she always did when entering the park,which was to bob down and put the flats of her hands down onthe ground for a moment. She had never quite worked out whyshe did this, and often she would adjust a shoe or pick up a pieceof litter as a pretext for the movement, but all she really wantedwas to feel the grass and the wet earth on her palms.

The park from this viewpoint was simply a dark shoulder thatrose up before them, obscuring itself. They mounted the hill andstood on the top of it, looking over the darkness of the rest of thepark to where it shaded off into the hazy light of the heart ofLondon which lay to the south. Ugly towers and blocks stuckyobbishly up out of the skyline, dominating the park, the sky,and the city.

A cold, damp wind moved across the park, flicking at it fromtime to time like the tail of a dark and broody horse. There wasan unsettled, edgy quality to it. In fact the night sky seemed toKate to be like a train of restless, irritable horses, their tracesflapping and slapping in the wind. It also seemed to her as if thetraces all radiated loosely from a single centre, and that thecentre was very close by her. She reprimanded herself for absurdsuggestibility, but nevertheless, it still seemed that all theweather was gathered and circling around them, waiting onthem.

Thor once more drew out his hammer, and held it before himin the thoughtful and abstracted manner she had seen a fewminutes before in her flat. He frowned, and seemed to bepicking tiny invisible pieces of dust off it. It was a little like

achimpanzee grooming its mate, or - that was it! - thecomparison was extraordinary, but it explained why she hadtensed herself so watchfully when last he had done it. It was likeJimmy Connors minutely adjusting the strings of his racquetbefore preparing to serve.

He looked up sharply once again, drew his arm back, turnedfully once, twice, three times, twisting his heels heavily in themud, and then hurled his hammer with astonishing force up tothe heavens.

It vanished almost instantly into the murky haze of the sky.Damp flashes sparked deep within the clouds, tracking its pathin a long parabola through the night. At the furthest extent of theparabola it swung down out of the clouds, a distant tiny pinpointmoving slowly now, gathering and redirecting its momentum forthe return flight. Kate watched, breathless, as the speck creptbehind the dome of St Paul's. It then seemed almost as if it hadhalted altogether, hanging silently and improbably in the air,before gradually beginning to increase microscopically in size asit accelerated back towards them.

Then, as it returned, it swung aside in its path, no longerdescribing a simple parabola, but following instead a new pathwhich seemed to lie along the perimeter of a gigantic Mobiusstrip which took it round the other side of the Telecom Tower.Then suddenly it was swinging back in a path directly towardsthem, hurtling out of the night with impossible weight and speedlike a piston in a shaft of light. Kate swayed and nearly droppedin a dead faint out of its path, when Thor stepped forward andcaught it with a grunt.

The jolt of it sent a single heavy shudder down into the earth,and then the thing was resting quietly in Thor's grip. His armquivered slightly and was still.

Kate felt quite dizzy. She didn't know exactly what it wasthat had just happened, but she felt pretty damn certain that itwas the sort of experience that her mother would not haveapproved of on a first date.

"Is this all part of what we have to do to go to Asgard?" shesaid. "Or are you just fooling around?"

"We will go to Asgard…now," he said.

At that moment he raised his hand as if to pluck an apple, butinstead of plucking he made a tiny, sharp turning movement.The effect was as if he had twisted the entire world through abillionth part of a billionth part of a degree. Everything shifted,was for a moment minutely out of focus, and then snapped backagain as a suddenly different world.

This world was a much darker one and colder still.

A bitter, putrid wind blew sharply, and made every breathgag in the throat. The ground beneath their feet was no longerthe soft muddy grass of the hill, but a foul-smelling, oozingslush. Darkness lay over all the horizon with a few smallexceptional fires dotted here and there in the distance, and onegreat blaze of light about a mile and a half away to the south-east.

Here, great fantastical towers stabbed at the night; hugepinnacles and turrets flickered in the firelight that surged from athousand windows. It was an edifice that mocked reason,ridiculed reality and jeered wildly at the night.

“My father’s palace,” said Thor, “the Great Hall of Valhallawhere we must go.”

It was just on the tip of Kate’s tongue to say that somethingabout the place was oddly familiar when the sound of horses’hooves pounding through the mud came to them on the wind. Ata distance, between where they stood and the Great Hall ofValhalla, a small number of flickering torches could be seenjolting towards them.

Thor once more studied the head of his hammer with interest,brushed it with his forefinger and rubbed it with his thumb. Thenslowly he looked up, again he twisted round once, then twiceand a third time and then hurled the missile into the sky. Thistime, however, he continued to hold on to its shaft with his righthand, while with his left he held Kate’s waist in his grasp.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 25

Cigarettes clearly intended to make themselves a major problemfor Dirk tonight.

For most of the day, except for when he'd woken up, andexcept for again shortly after he'd woken up, and except forwhen he had just encountered the revolving head of GeoffreyAnstey, which was understandable, and also except for whenhe'd been in the pub with Kate, he had had absolutely nocigarettes at all.

Not one. They were out of his life, foresworn utterly. Hedidn't need them. He could do without them. They merelynagged at him like mad and made his life a living hell, but hedecided he could handle that.

Now, however, just when he had suddenly decided, coolly,rationally, as a clear, straightforward decision rather than merelya feeble surrender to craving, that he would, after all, have acigarette, could he find one? He could not.

The pubs by this stage of the night were well closed. The latenight corner shop obviously meant something different by "latenight" than Dirk did, and though Dirk was certain that he couldconvince the proprietor of the rightness of his case through sheerlinguistic and syllogistic bravado, the wretched man wasn'tthere to undergo it.

A mile away there was a 24-hour filling station, but it turnedout just to have sustained an armed robbery. The plate glass wasshattered and crazed round a tiny hole, police were swarmingover the place. The attendant was apparently not badly injured,but he was still losing blood from a wound in his arm, havinghysterics and being treated for shock, and no one would sellDirk any cigarettes. They simply weren't in the mood.

"You could buy cigarettes in the blitz," protested Dirk."People took a pride in it. Even with the bombs falling and thewhole city ablaze you could still get served. Some poor fellow,just lost two daughters and a leg, would still say `Plain or filtertipped?' if you asked him."

"I expect you would, too," muttered a white-faced youngpoliceman.

"It was the spirit of the age," said Dirk.

"Bug off," said the policeman.

And that, thought Dirk to himself, was the spirit of this. Heretreated, miffed, and decided to prowl the streets with his handsin his pockets for a while.

Camden Passage. Antique clocks. Antique clothes. Nocigarettes.

Upper Street. Antique buildings being ripped apart. No signof cigarette shops being put up in their place.

Chapel Market, desolate at night. Wet litter wildly flapping.Cardboard boxes, egg boxes, paper bags and cigarette packets-empty ones.

Pentonville Road. Grim concrete monoliths, eyeing the newspaces in Upper Street where they hoped to spawn their horridprogeny.

King's Cross station. They must have cigarettes, for heaven'ssake. Dirk hurried on down towards it.

The old frontage to the station reared up above the area, agreat yellow brick wall with a clock tower and two huge archesfronting the two great train sheds behind. In front of this lay theone-storey modern concourse which was already far shabbierthan the building, a hundred years its senior, which it obscuredand generally messed up. Dirk imagined that when the designsfor the modern concourse had been drawn up the architects hadexplained that it entered into an exciting and challengingdialogue with the older building.

King's Cross is an area where terrible things happen topeople, to buildings, to cars, to trains, usually while you wait,and if you weren't careful you could easily end up involved in apiece of exciting and challenging dialogue yourself. You couldhave a cheap car radio fitted while you waited, and if you turnedyour back for a couple of minutes, it would be removed whileyou waited as well. Other things you could have removed whileyou waited were your wallet, your stomach lining, your mindand your will to live. The muggers and pushers and pimps andhamburger salesmen, in no particular order, could arrange allthese things for you.

But could they arrange a packet of cigarettes, thought Dirk,with a mounting sense of tension. He crossed York Way,declined a couple of surprising offers on the grounds that theydid not involve cigarettes in any immediately obvious way,hurried past the closed bookshop and in through the mainconcourse doors, away from the life of the street and into thesafer domain of British Rail.

He looked around him.

Here things seemed rather strange and he wondered why, buthe only wondered this very briefly because he was alsowondering if there was anywhere open selling cigarettes andthere wasn't.

He sagged forlornly. It seemed to him that he had beenplaying catch-up with the world all day. The morning hadstarted in about as disastrous a way as it was possible for amorning to start, and he had never managed to get a proper gripon it since. He felt like somebody trying to ride a bolting horse,with one foot in a stirrup and the other one still bounding alonghopefully on the ground behind. And now even as simple a thingas a cigarette was proving to be beyond his ability to get hold of.

He sighed and found himself a seat, or at least, room on abench.

This was not an immediately easy thing to do. The stationwas more crowded than he had expected to find it at - what wasit? he looked up at the clock - one o'clock in the morning. Whatin the name of God was he doing on King's Cross station at oneo'clock in the morning, with no cigarette and no home that hecould reasonably expect to get into without being hacked todeath by a homicidal bird?

He decided to feel sorry for himself. That would pass thetime. He looked around himself, and after a while the impulse tofeel sorry for himself gradually subsided as he began to take inhis surroundings.

What was strange about it was seeing such an immediatelyfamiliar place looking so unfamiliar. There was the ticket office,still open for ticket sales, but looking sombre and beleagueredand wishing it was closed.

There was the W.H.Smith, closed for the night. No one wouldbe needing any further newspapers or magazines tonight, exceptfor purposes of accommodation, and old ones would do just aswell for sleeping under.

The pimps and hookers, drug-pushers and hamburgersalesmen were all outside in the streets and in the hamburgerbars. If you wanted quick sex or a dirty fix or, God help you, ahamburger, that was where you went to get it.

Here were the people that nobody wanted anything from atall. This was where they gathered for shelter until they wereperiodically shooed out. There was something people wantedfrom them, in fact - their absence. That was in hot demand, butnot easily supplied. Everybody has to be somewhere.

Dirk looked from one to another of the men and womenshuffling round or sitting hunched in seats or struggling to tryand sleep across benches that were specifically designed toprevent them from doing exactly that.

"Got a fag, mate?"

"What? No, I'm sorry. No, I haven't got one," replied

Dirk,awkwardly patting his coat pockets in embarrassment, as if tosuggest the making of a search which he knew would befruitless. He was startled to be summoned out of his reverie likethis.

“Here you are, then.” The old man offered him a beat-up onefrom a beat-up packet.

“What? Oh. Oh - thanks. Thank you ” Momentarily takenaback by the offer, Dirk nevertheless accepted the cigarettegratefully, and took a light from the tip of the cigarette the oldman was smoking himself.

“What you come hene for then?” asked the old man - notchallenging, just curious.

Dirk tried to look at him without making it seem as if he waslooking him up and down. The man was wildly bereft of teeth,had startled and matted hair, and his old clothes were wellmulched down around him, but the eyes which sagged out of hisface were fairly calm. He wasn’t expecting anything worse thanhe could deal with to happen to him.

“Well, just this in fact,” said Dirt, twiddling the cigarette.”Thanks. Couldn’t find one anywhere.”

“Oh ah,” said the old man.

“Got this mad bird at home,” said Dirk. “Kept attacking me.”

“Oh ah,” said the man, nodding resignedly.

“I mean an actual bird,” said Dirk, “an eagle.”

“Oh ah.”

“With great wings.”

“Oh ah.”

“Got hold of me with one of its talons through the letter-box.”

“Oh ah.”

Dirk wondered if it was worth pursuing the conversationmuch further. He lapsed into silence and looked around.

“You’re lucky it didn’t slash at you with its beak as well,”said the old man after a while. “An eagle will do that whenroused.”

“It did!” said Dirk. “It did! Look, right here on my nose. Thatwas through the letter-box as well. You’d scarcely believe it! Talk about grip! Talk about reach! Look at what it did to myhand!”

He held it out for sympathy. The old man gave it anappraising look.

“Oh ah,” he said at last, and retreated into his own thoughts.

Dirk drew his injured hand back.

“Know a lot about eagles, then, do you?”

The man didn’t answer, but seemed instead to retreat stillfurther.

“Lot of people here tonight,” Dirk ventured again, after awhile.

The man shrugged. He took a long drag on his cigarette, halfclosing his eyes against the smoke.

“Is it always like this? I mean, are there always so manypeople here at night?”

The man merely looked down, slowly releasing the smokefrom his mouth and nostrils.

Yet again, Dirk looked around. A man a few feet away, not soold-looking as Dirk’s companion but wildly deranged in hisdemeanour, had sat nodding hectically over a bottle of cookingbrandy all this time. He slowly stopped his nodding, screwedwith difficulty a cap on to the bottle, and slipped it into thepocket of his ragged old coat. An old fat woman who had beenfitfully browsing through the bulging black bin liner of herpossessions began to twist the top of it together and fold it.

“You’d almost think that something was about to happen,”said Dirk.

“Oh ah,” said his companion. He put his hands on his knees,bent forward and raised himself painfully to his feet. Though hewas bent and slow, and though his clothes were dirt-ridden andtattered, there was some little power and authority there in hisbearing.

The air which he unsettted as he stood, which flowed outfrom the folds of his skin and ctothes, was richly pungent evento Dirk’s numbed nostrils. It was a smell that never stoppedcoming at you - just as Dirk thought it must have peaked, so itstruck on upwards with renewed frenzy till Dirk thought that hisvery brain would vaporise.

He tried not to choke, indeed he tried to smile courteouslywithout allowing his eyes to run as the man turned to him andsaid, “Infuse some blossom of the bitter orange. Add somesprinklings of sage while it is still warm. This is very good foreagle wounds. There are those who will add apricot and almondoil and even, the heavens defend us, sedra. But then there arealways those that will overdo things. And sometimes we haveneed of them. Oh ah.”

With that he turned away once more and joined the growingstream of pathetic, hunched and abused bodies that were headingfor the front exit from the station. In all about two, maybe threedozen were leaving. Each seemed to be leaving separatety, eachfor his or her entirely independent reasons, and not followingtoo fast the one upon the other, and yet it was not hard to tell, foranyone who cared to watch these people that no one

cared towatch or see, that they were leaving together and in a stream.

Dirk carefulty nursed his cigarette for a minute or so andwatched them intently as one by one they left. Once he wascertain that there were no more to go, and that the last two orthree of them were at the door, he dropped the cigarette andground it out with his heel. Then he noticed that the old man hadleft behind his crumpled cigarette packet. Dirk looked inside andsaw that there were still two bedraggled cigarettes left. He poc-keted it, stood up, and quietly followed at a distance that hethought was properly respectful.

Outside on the Euston Road the night air was grumbling andunsettled. He loitered idly by the doorway, watching which waythey went - to the west. He took one of the cigarettes out and litit and then idled off westwards himself, around the taxi rank andtowards St Pancras Street.

On the west side of St Pancras Street, just a few yards northof the Euston Road, a flight of steps leads up to the forecourt ofthe old Midland Grand Hotel, the huge, dark gothic fantasy of abuilding which stands, empty and desolate, across the front of StPancras railway station.

Over the top of the steps, picked out in gold letters onwrought-iron-work, stands the name of the station. Taking histime, Dirk followed the last of the band of old tramps andderelicts up these steps, which emerged just to the side of asmall, squat, brick building which was used as a car-park. To theright, the great dark hulk of the old hotel spread off into thenight, its roofline a vast assortment of wild turrets, gnarledspires and pinnacles which seemed to prod at and goad the nightsky.

High in the dim darkness, silent stone figures stood guardbehind long shields, grouped around pilasters behind wrought-iron railings. Carved dragons crouched gaping at the sky as DirkGently, in his flapping leather coat, approached the great ironportals which led to the hotel, and to the great vaulted train shedof St Pancras station. Stone figures of winged dogs croucheddown from the top of pillars.

Here, in the bridged area between the hotel entrance and thestation booking hall, was parked a large unmarked greyMercedes van. A quick glance at the front of it was enough totell Dirk that it was the same one which had nearly forced himoff the road several hours earlier in the Cotswolds.

Dirk walked into the booking hall, a large space with greatpanelled walls along which were spaced fat marble columns

inthe form of tonch holders.

At this time of night the ticket office was closed - trains donot run all night from St Pancras - and beyond it the vastchamber of the station itself, the great Victorian train shed, wasshrouded in darkness and shadow.

Dirk stood quietly secluded in the entrance to the bookinghall and watched as the old tramps and bag tadies, who hadentered the station by the main entrance from the forecourt,mingled together in the dimness. There were now many morethan two dozen of them, perhaps as many as a hundred, andthere seemed to be about them an air of repressed excitementand tension.

As they moved about it seemed to Dirk after a while that,though he had been surprised at how many of them there hadbeen when he first arrived, there seemed now to be fewer andfewer of them. He peered into the gloom trying to make outwhat was happening. He detached himself from his seclusion inthe entrance to the booking hall and entered the main vault, butkept himself nevertheless as close to the side wall as possible ashe ventured in towards them.

There were definitely fewer still of them now, a mere handfulleft. He had a distinct sense of people slipping away into theshadows and not re-emerging from them.

He frowned at them.

The shadows were deep but they weren't that deep. He beganto hurry forward, and quickly threw all caution aside to reach thesmall remaining group. But by the time he reached the centre ofthe concourse where they had been gathered there were noneremaining at all and he was left whirling round in confusion inthe middle of the great, dark, empty railway station.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 26

The only thing which prevented Kate screaming was the sheerpressure of air rushing into her lungs as she hurtled into the sky.

When, a few seconds later, the blinding acceleration eased alittle, she found she was gulping and choking, her eyes werestinging and streaming to the extent that she could hardly see,and there was hardly a muscle in her body which wasn'tgibbering with shock as waves of air pummelled past her, tear-ing at her hair and clothes and making her knees, knuckles andteeth batter at each other.

She had to struggle with herself to suppress her urge tostruggle. On the one hand she absolutely certainly did not wantto be let go of. Insofar as she had any understanding at all ofwhat was happening to her she knew that she did not want to belet go of. On the other hand the physical shock of it was facingsome stiff competition from her sheer affronted rage at beingsuddenly hauled into the sky without warning. The result of thiswas that she struggled rather feebly and was angry at herself fordoing so. She ended up clinging to Thor's arm in the most abjectand undignified way.

The night was dark, and the blessing of this, she supposed,was that she could not see the ground. The lights she had seendotted here and there in the distance now swung sickeninglyaway beneath her, but her instincts would not identify them asrepresenting ground. Already the flickering beacons whichshone from the insanely turreted building she had glimpsedseconds before this outrage occurred were swaying away behindher now at an increasing distance.

They were still ascending.

She could not struggle, she could not speak. She couldprobably, if she tried, bite the stupid brute's arm, but shecontented herself with the idea of this rather than the actualdeed.

The air was bad and rasped in her lungs. Her nose and eyeswere streaming, and this made it impossible for her to lookforward. When she did try it, just once, she caught a momentaryblurred glimpse of the head of the hammer streaking out throughthe dark air of them, of Thor's arm grasping its stuntedhandle and being pulled forward by it. His other arm wasgripped around her waist. The strength of him defied herimagination but did not make her any the less angry.

She got the feeling that they were now skimming along justbeneath the clouds. Every now and then they would be buffetedby damp clamminess, and breathing would become yet harderand more noxious. The wet air tasted bitter, and deadly cold, andher streaming wet hair lashed and slammed about her face.

She decided that the cold was definitely going to kill her, andafter a while was convinced that she was beginning to loseconsciousness. In fact she realised she was actually trying tolose consciousness but she couldn't. Time slipped into agreyness though, and she was less aware of how much of it waspassing.

At last she began to sense that they were slowing and thatthey were beginning to curve back downwards. This precipitatedfresh waves of nausea and disorientation in her, and she felt thather stomach was being slowly turned through a mangle.

The air was, if anything, getting worse. It smelled worse,tasted more acrid and seemed to be getting a great deal moreturbulent. They were definitely slowing now, and the going wasbecoming more and more difficult. The hammer was clearlypointing downwards now, and finding its way along rather thansurging ahead.

Down still further they went, battling through the thickeningclouds that swirled round them till it seemed that they must nowreach all the way down to the ground.

Their speed had dropped to the point where Kate felt able tolook ahead now, though the acridity of the air was such that shewas only able to manage a very brief glance. In the moment thatshe glanced, Thor released the hammer. She couldn't believe it.He released it only for a fraction of a second, just to change hisgrip on the thing, so that they were now hanging from the shaftas it flew slowly forward, rather than being pulled along by it.As he redistributed his weight into this new posture he hoistedKate firmly upwards as if pulling up a sock. Down they went,and down further and further.

There was now a roaring crashing sound borne in on them bythe wind from up ahead, and suddenly Thor was running,leaping over rocky, sandy scrubland, dancing through theknotted tussocks, and finally pounding and drumming his feet toa halt.

They stood still at last, swaying, but the ground on whichthey stood was solid.

Kate breathed for a few seconds, bending over to catch herbreath. She then pulled herself up to her full height and wasabout to deliver a full account of her feelings concerning

theseevents at the top of her voice, when she suddenly got analarming sense of where she was standing.

Though the night was dark, the wind whipping at her and thepungent smell of it told her that some kind of sea was very closeby. The sound of wild crashing breakers told her that in fact itwas more or less beneath her, that they were standing very nearto the edge of a cliff. She gripped the arm of the insufferable godwho had brought her here and hoped, vainly, that it hurt him.

As her reeling senses began gradually to calm down shenoticed that there was a dim light spreading away before her,and after a while she realised that this was coming off the sea.

The whole sea was glowing like an infection. It was rearingitself up in the night, lunging and thrashing in a turmoil of itselfand then smashing itself to pieces in a frenzy of pain against therocks of the coast. Sea and sky seethed at each other in apoisonous fury.

Kate watched it speechlessly, and then became aware of Thorstanding at her shoulder.

“I met you at an airport,” he said, his voice breaking up in thewind. “I was trying to get home to Norway by plane.” Hepointed out to sea. “I wanted you to see why I couldn’t comethis way.”

“Where are we? What is this?” asked Kate fearfully.

“In your world, this is the North Sea,” said Thor and turnedaway inland again, walking heavily and dragging his hammerbehind him.

Kate pulled her wet coat close around her and hurried afterhim.

“Well, why didn’t you just fly home the way we just did butin, well, in our world?”

The rage in her had subsided into vague worries aboutvocabulary.

“I tried,” responded Thor, still walking away.

“Well, what happened?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“What on earth’s the point of that?”

“I’m not going to discuss it.”

Kate shuddered in exasperation. “Is this godlike behaviour?”she shouted. “It bothers you so you won’t talk about it?”

“Thor! Thor! Is it you?”

This last was a thin voice trailing over the wind. Kate peeredinto the wind. Through the darkness a lantern was bobbingtowards them from behind a low rise.

“Is that you, Thor?” A little old lady came into view, holdinga lantern above her head, hobbling enthusiastically. “I thoughtthat must be your hammer I saw. Welcome!” she chirruped.”Oh, but you come in dismal times. I was just putting the pot onand thinking of having a cup of something and then perhapskilling myself, but then I said to myself, just wait a couple ofdays longer, Tsuliwa…, Tsuwila…, Swuli…, Tsuliwansis - Ican never pronounce my own name properly when I’m talkingto myself, and it drives me hopping mad, as I’m sure you canimagine, such a bright boy as I’ve always maintained, nevermind what those others say, so I said to myself, Tsuliwansis,see if anyone comes along, and if they don’t, well, then might bea good time to think about killing myself. And look! Now hereyou are! Oh, but you are welcome, welcome! And I see you’vebrought a little friend. Are you going to introduce me? Hello,my dear, hello! My name’s Tsuliwansis and I won’t be at alloffended if you stutter.”

“I… I’m, er, Kate,” said Kate, totally flummoxed.

“Yes, well I’m sure that will be all right,” said the old womansharply. “Anyway, come along if you’re coming. If you’re goingto hang around out here all night I may as well just get straighton with killing myself now and let you get your own tea whenyou’re quite ready. Come along!”

She hurried on ahead, and in a very few yards they reached aterrible kind of ramshackle structure of wood and mud whichlooked as if it had become unaccountably stuck while half waythrough collapsing. Kate glanced at Thor, hoping to read somekind of reaction from him to give her a bearing on the situation,but he was occupied with his own thoughts and was clearly notabout to share them. Thene seemed to her to be a difference inthe way he moved, though. In the brief experience she had ofhim he seemed constantly to be struggling with some internaland constrained anger, and this, she felt, had lifted. Not goneaway, just lifted. He stood aside to allow her to enterTsuliwansis’s shack, and brusquely gestured her to go in. Hefollowed, ducking absurdly, a few seconds later, having pausedfor a moment outside to survey what little could be seen of thesurrounding landscape.

Inside was tiny. A few boards with straw for a bed, asimmering pot hung over a fire, and a box tucked away in thecorner for sitting on.

“And this is the knife I was thinking of using, you see,” saidTsuliwansis, fussing around. “Just been sharpening it up nicely,you see. It comes up very nice if you get a nice sweeping actionwith the stone, and I was thinking here would be a good

place,you see? Here on the wall, I can stick the handle in this crack soit's held nice and firm, and then just go fling! And fling myselfat it. Fling! You see? I wonder, should it be a little lower, whatdo you think, my dear? Know about these things, do you?"

Kate explained that she did not, and managed to soundreasonably calm about it.

"Tsuliwansis," said Thor, "we have come not to stay butto… Tsuli - please put the knife down."

Tsuliwansis was standing looking up at them quite chirpily,but she was also holding the knife, with its great heavy sweepingblade, poised over her own left wrist.

"Don't mind me, dears," she said, "I'm quite comfortable. Ican just pop off any time I'm ready. Happy to. These times arenot to live in. Oh, no. You go off and be happy. I won't disturbyour happiness with the sound of me screaming. I'll hardlymake a sound with the knife as you go." She stood quiveringand challenging.

Carefully, almost gently, Thor reached out and drew the knifeaway and out of her shaking hand. The old woman seemed tocrumple as it went, and all the performance faded out of her. Shesat back in a heap on her box. Thor squatted down in front ofher, slowly drew her to him and hugged her. She graduallyseemed to come back to life, and eventually pushed him awaytelling him not to be so stupid, and then made a bit of a fuss ofsmoothing out her hopelessly ragged and dirty black dress.

When once she had composed herself properly she turned herattention to Kate and looked her up and down.

"You're a mortal, dear, aren't you?" she said at last.

"Well… yes," said Kate.

"I can tell it from your fancy dress. Oh, yes. Well, now yousee what the world looks like from the other side, don't you,dear? What do you think then?"

Kate explained that she did not yet know what to think. Thorsat himself down on the floor and leant his big head back againstthe wall, half-closing his eyes. Kate had the sense that he waspreparing himself for something.

"It used to be things were not so different," continued the oldwoman. "Used to be lovely here, you know, all lovely. Bit ofgive and take between us. Terrible rows, of course, terriblefights, but really it was all lovely. Now?" She let out a long andtired sigh, and brushed a bit of nothing much off the wall.

"Oh, things are bad," she said, "things are very bad. You seethings get affected by things. Our world affects your world,

yourworld affects our world. Sometimes it is hard to know exactlywhat that effect is. Very often it is hard to like it, either. Most ofthem, these days, are difficult and bad. But our worlds are sonearly the same in so many ways. Where in your world you havea building there will be a structure here as well. Maybe it will bea small muddy hillock, or a beehive, or an abode like this one.Maybe it will be something a little grander, but it will besomething. You all right, Thor, dear?"

The Thunder God closed his eyes and nodded. His elbows layeasily across his knees. The ragged strips of Kate's nightgownbound about his left forearm were limp and wet. He idly pushedthem off.

"And where there is something which is not dealt withproperly in your world," the old lady pranled on, "as like as notit will emerge in ours. Nothing disappears. No guilty secret. Nounspoken thought. It may be a new and mighty god in our world,or it may be just a gnat, but it will be here. I might add that thesedays it is more often a gnat than a new and mighty god. Oh,there are so many more gnats and fewer immortal gods thanonce there were."

"How can there be fewer immortals?" asked Kate. "I don'twant to be pedantic about it, but - "

"Well, there's being immortal, dear, and then again there'sbeing immortal. I mean, if I could just get this knife properlysecured and then work up a really good fling, we'd soon seewho was immortal and who wasn't."

"Tsuli…" admonished Thor, but didn't open his eyes to do it.

"One by one we're going, though. We are, Thor. You're oneof the few that care. There's few enough now that haven'tsuccumbed to alcoholism or the onx."

"What is that? Some kind of disease?" asked Kate. She wasbeginning to feel cross again. Having been dragged unwillinglyfrom her flat and hurled across the whole of East Anglia on theend of a hammer, she was irritated at being then just abandonedto a conversation with an insanely suicidal old woman whileThor just sat and looked content with himself, leaving her tomake an effort she was not in a mood to make.

"It's an affliction, dear, which only gods get. It really meansthat you can't take being a god any more, which is why onlygods get it you see."

"I see."

"In the final stages of it you simply lie on the ground andafter a while a tree grows out of your head and then it's all over.You rejoin the earth, seep into its bowels, flow through its

vitalarteries, and eventually emerge as a great pure torrent of water,and as like as not get a load of chemical waste dumped into you.It's a grim business being a god nowadays, even a dead god.

"Well," she said, patting her knees. Her eyes hovered onThor, who had opened his eyes but was only using them to stareat his own knuckles and fingertips. "Well, I hear you have anappointment tonight, Thor."

"Hmm," grunted Thor, without moving.

"I hear you've called together the Great Hall for theChallenging Hour, is that right?"

"Hmm," said Thor.

"The Challenging Hour, hmm? Well, I know that things havenot been too good between you and your father for a long time.Hmm?"

Thor wasn't going to be drawn. He said nothing.

"I thought it was quite dreadful about Wales," continuedTsuliwansis. "Don't know why you stood for it. Of course Irealise that he's your father and the All-Father which makes itdifficult. But, Odin, Odin - I've known him for so long. Youknow that he made a deal once to sacrifice one of his own eyesin exchange for wisdom? Of course you do, dear, you're his son,aren't you? Well, what I've always said is he should stand upand make a fuss about that particular deal, demand his eye back.Do you know what I mean by that, Thor? And that horrible ToeRag. There's someone to be careful of, Thor, very carefulindeed. Well, I expect I shall hear all about it in the morning,won't I?"

Thor slid his back up the wall and stood up. He clasped theold woman warmly by the hands and smiled a tight smile, butsaid nothing. With a slight nod he gestured to Kate that theywere leaving. Since leaving was what she most wanted in all theworld to do she resisted the temptation to say "Oh yeah?" andkick up a fuss about being treated like this. Meekly she bade apolite farewell to the old woman and made her way out into themurky night. Thor followed her.

She folded her arms and said, "Well? Where now? Whatother great social events have you got in store for me thisevening?"

Thor prowled around a linle, examining the ground. Hepulled out his hammer, and weighed it appreciatively in hishands. He peered out into the night, and swung the hammer acouple of times, idly. He swung himself round a couple of times,again not hard. He loosed the hammer, which bounded off intothe night and split open a casually situated rock a couple ofdozen yards away and then bounded back. He caught it easily,tossed it up into

the air and caught it easily again.

Then he turned to her and looked her in the eye for the firsttime.

“Would you like to see something?” he asked.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 27

A gust of wind blew through the huge vaults of the emptystation and nearly provoked in Dirk a great howl of frustration atthe trail that had so suddenly gone cold on him. The coldmoonlight draped itself through the long ranges of glass panelsthat extended the length of the St Pancras station roof.

It fell on empty rails, and illuminated them. It fell on the traindepartures board, it fell on the sign which explained that todaywas a Blue Saver Day and illuminated them both.

Framed in the archway formed by the far end of the vaultedroof were the fantastical forms of five great gasometers, thesupporting superstructures of which seemed in theiradumbrations to be tangled impossibly with each other, like thehoops of an illusionist's conjuring trick. The moonlightilluminated these as well, but Dirk it did not illuminate.

He had watched upwards of a hundred people or so simplyvanish into thin air in a way that was completely impossible.That in itself did not give him a problem. The impossible did notbother him unduly. If it could not possibly be done, thenobviously it had been done impossibly. The question was how?

He paced the area of the station which they had all vanishedfrom, and scanned everything that could be seen from everyvantage point within it, looking for any clue, any anomaly,anything that might let him pass into whatever it was he had justseen a hundred people pass into as if it was nothing. He had thesense of a major party taking place in the near vicinity, to whichhe had not been invited. In desperation he started to spin aroundwith his arms outstretched, then decided this was completelyfutile and lit a cigarette instead.

He noticed that as he had pulled out the packet, a piece ofpaper had fluttered from his pocket, which, once the cigarettewas burning well, he stooped to retrieve.

It was nothing exciting, just the bill he had picked up fromthe stroppy nurse in the caf. "Outrageous," he thought abouteach of the items in turn as he scanned down them, and wasabout to screw it up and throw it away when a thought struckhim about the general layout of the document.

The items charged were listed down the left hand side, andthe actual charges down the right.

On his own bills when he issued them, when he had a client,which was rare at the moment, and the ones he did have

seemedunable to stay alive long enough to receive his bills and beoutraged by them, he usually went to a little trouble about theitems charged. He constructed essays, little paragraphs todescribe them. He liked the client to feel that he or she wasgetting his or her money's worth in this respect at least.

In short, the bills he issued corresponded in layout almostexactly to the wad of papers with indecipherable runic scriptswhich he had been unable to make head or tail of a couple ofhours previously. Was that helpful? He didn't know. If the wadwas not a contract but a bill, what might it be the bill for? Whatservices had been performed? They must certainly have beenintricate services. Or at least, intricately described services.Which professions might that apply to? It was at least somethingto think about. He screwed up the caf bill and moved off tothrow it into a bin.

As it happened, this was a fortuitous move.

It meant that he was away from the central open space of thestation, and near a wall against which he could press himselfinconspicuously when he suddenly heard the sound of two pairsof feet crossing the forecourt outside.

In a few seconds, they entered the main part of the station, bywhich time Dirk was well out of sight round the angle of a wall.

Being well out of sight worked less well for him in anotherrespect, which was that for a while he was unable to see theowners of the feet. By the time he caught a glimpse of them,they had reached exactly the same area where a few minutespreviously a small horde of people had, quietly and without fuss,vanished.

He was surprised by the red spectacles of the woman and thequietly tailred Italian suit of the man, and also the speed withwhich they themselves then immediately vanished.

Dirk stood speechless. The same two damn people who hadbeen the bane of his life for the entire day (he allowed himselfthis slight exaggeration on the grounds of extreme provocation)had now flagrantly and deliberately disappeared in front of hiseyes.

Once he was quite certain that they had absolutely definitelyvanished and were not merely hiding behind each other, heventured out once more into the mysterious space.

It was bafflingly ordinary. Ordinary tarmacadam, ordinaryair, ordinary everything. And yet a quantity of people that wouldhave kept the Bermuda triangle industry happy for an entiredecade had just vanished in it within the space of five minutes.

He was deeply aggravated.

He was so deeply aggravated that he thought he would sharethe sense of aggravation by phoning someone up andaggravating them - as it would be almost certain to do at twentypast one in the morning.

This wasn't an entirely arbitrary thought - he was stillanxious concerning the safety of the American girl, KateSchechter, and had not been at all reassuned to have beenanswered by her machine when last he had called. By now sheshould surely be at home and in bed asleep, and would bereassuringly livid to be woken by a meddling phone call at thistime.

He found a couple of coins and a working telephone anddialled her number. He got her answering machine again.

It said that she had just out for the night to Asgard.She wasn't certain which parts of Asgard they were going to butthey would probably swing by Valhalla later, if the evening wasup to it. If he cared to leave a message she would deal with it inthe morning if she was still alive and in the mood. There weresome beeps, which rang on in Dirk's ear for seconds after heheard them.

"Oh," he said, realising that the machine was currently busytaping him, "good heavens. Well, I thought the arrangement wasthat you were going to call me befone doing anythingimpossible."

He put the phone down, his head spinning angrily. Valhalla,eh? Was that where everybody was going to tonight except him?He had a good mind to go home, go to bed and wake up in thegrocery business.

Valhalla.

He looked about him once again, with the name Valhallaringing in his ears. There was no doubt, he felt, that a space thissize would make a good feasting hall for gods and dead heroes,and that the empty Midland Grand Hotel would be almost worthmoving the shebang from Norway for.

He wondered if it made any difference knowing what it wasyou were walking into.

Nervously, tentatively, he walked across and through thespace in question. Nothing. Oh well. He turned, andstood surveying it for a moment or two while he took a coupleof slow drags on the cigarette he had got from the tramp. Thespace didn't look any different.

He walked back through it again, this time a little lesstentatively, but with slow positive steps. Once again, nothinghappened, but then just as he was moving out of it at the end hehalf fancied that he half heard a half moment of some kind

ofraucous sound, like a burst of white noise on a twisted radio dial.He turned once more, and headed back into the space, movinghis head carefully round trying to pick up the slightest sound.For a while he didn't catch it, then suddenly there was a snatchof it that burst around him and was gone. A movement andanother snatch. He moved very, very slowly and carefully. Withthe most slight and gentle movements, trying to catch at thesound he moved his head round what seemed like a billionthpart of a billionth part of a degree, slipped behind a moleculeand was gone.

He had instantly to duck to avoid a great eagle swooping outof the vast space at him.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 28

It was another eagle, a different eagle. The next one was adifferent eagle too, and the next. The air seemed to be thick witheagles, and it was obviously impossible to enter Valhallawithout getting swooped on by at least half a dozen of them.Even eagles were being swooped on by eagles.

Dirk threw up his arms over his head to fend off the wild,beating flurries, turned, tripped and fell down behind a hugetable on to a floor of heavy, damp, earthy straw. His hat rolledunder the table. He scrambled after it, stuffed it back firmly onhis head, and slowly peered up over the table.

The hall was dark, but alive with great bonfires.

Noise and woodsmoke filled the air, and the smells ofroasting pigs, roasting sheep, roasting boar, and sweat andreeking wine and singed eagle wings.

The table he was crouched behind was one of countless slabsof oak on trestles that stretched in every direction, laden withsteaming hunks of dead animals, huge breads, great iron beakersslopping with wine and candles like wax anthills. Massivesweaty figures seethed around them, on them, eating, drinking,fighting over the food, fighting in the food, fighting with thefood.

A yard or so from Dirk, a warrior was standing on top of atable fighting a pig which had been roasting for six hours, and hewas clearly losing, but losing with vim and spirit and beingcheered on by other warriors who were dousing him down withwine from a trough.

The roof - as much of it as could be made out at this distance,and by the dark and flickering light of the bonfires - was madeof lashed-together shields.

Dirk clutched his hat, kept his head down and ran, trying tomake his way towards the side of the hall. As he ran, feelinghimself to be virtually invisible by reason of being completelysober and, by his own lights, normally dressed, he seemed topass examples of every form of bodily function imaginable,other than actual teeth-cleaning.

The smell, like that of the tramp in King’s Cross station, whomust surely be here participating, was one that never stoppedcoming at you. It grew and grew until it seemed that your headhad to become bigger and bigger to accommodate it. The din ofsword on sword, sword on shield, sword on flesh, flesh on fleshwas one that made the eardrums reel and quiver and want to

cry.He was pummelled, tripped, elbowed, shoved and drenched withwine as he scumed and pushed through the wild throng, butarrived at last at a side wall - massive slabs of wood and stonefaced with sheets of stinking cow hide.

Panting, he stopped for a moment, looked back and surveyedthe scene with amazement.

It was Valhalla.

Of that there would be absolutely no question. This was notsomething that could be mocked up by a catering company. Andthe whole seething, wild mass of carousing gods and warriorsand their caroused-at ladies, with their shields and fires andboars did seem to fill a space that must be somethingapproaching the size of St Pancras station. The sheer heat thatrose off it all seemed as if it should suffocate the flocks ofderanged eagles which thrashed through the air above them.

And maybe it was. He was by no means certain that a flock ofenraged eagles which thought that they might be suffocatingwould behave significantly differently from many of the eagleshe was currently watching.

There was something he had been putting off wonderingwhile he had fought his way through the mass, but the time hadcome to wonder it now.

What, he wondered, about the Draycotts?

What could the Draycotts possibly be doing here? Andwhene, in such a mle, could the Draycotts possibly be?

He narrowed his eyes and peered into the heaving throng, trying to see if he could locate anywhere a pair of red designerspectacles or a quiet Italian suit mingling out there with theclanging breastplates and the sweaty leathers, knowing that theattempt was futile but feeling that it should be made.

No, he decided, he couldn't see them. Not, he felt, their kindof party. Further reflections along these lines were cut short by aheavy short-handled axe which hurtled through the air andburied itself with an astounding thud in the wall about threeinches from his left ear and for a moment blotted out all thought.

When he recovered from the shock of it, and let his breathout, he thought that it was probably not somethiog that had beenthrown at him with malicious intent, but was merely warriorlyhigh spirits. Nevertheless, he was not in a partying mood anddecided to move on. He edged his way along the wall in thedirection which, had this actually been St Pancras station ratherthan the hall of Valhalla, would have led to the ticket office. Hedidn't know what he would find there, but he reckoned

that itmust be different to this, which would be good.

It seemed to him that things were generally quieter here, outon the periphery.

The biggest and best of the good tunes soemed to beconcentrated more strongly towanls the middle of the hall,whereas the tables he was passing now seemed to be peopledwith those who looked as if they had teached that season in theirimmortal lives when they preferred to contemplate the timeswhen they used to wrestle dead pigs, and to pass appreciativecomments to each other about the finer points of dead pigwrestling technique, than actually to wrestle with one againthemselves just at the moment.

He overheard one remark to his companion that it was theleft-handed three-fingered flat grip on the opponent's sternumthat was all-important at the crucial moment of finally not quitefalling over in a complete stupor, to which his companionresponded with a benign "Oh ah."

Dirk stopped, looked and backtracked.

Sitting hunched in a thoughtful posture over his iron plate,and clad in heavily stained and matted furs and buckles whichwere, if anything, more rank and stinking than the ensembleDirk had last encountered him in, was Dirk's companion fromthe concourse at King's Cross station.

Dirk wondered how to approach him. A quick backslap and a"Hey! Good party. Lot of energy," was one strategy, but Dirkdidn't think it was the right one.

While he was wondering, an eagle suddenly swooped downfrom out of the air and, with a lot of beating and thrashing,landed on the table in front of the old man, folded its wings andadvanced on him, demanding to be fed. Easily, the old manpulled a bit of meat off a bone and held it up to the great bird,which pecked it sharply but accurately out of his fingers.

Dirk thought that this was the key to a friendly approach. Heleant over the table and picked up a small hunk of meat andoffered it in turn to the bird. The bird attacked him and went forhis neck, forcing him to try and beat the savage creature off withhis hat, but the introduction was made.

"Oh ah," said the man, shooed the eagle away and shifted acouple of inches along the bench. Though it was not a fulsomeinvitation, it was at least an invitation. Dirk clambered over thebench and sat down.

`"Thank you," said Dirk, puffing.

"Oh ah."

"If you remember, we - "

At that moment the most tremendous reverberating thumpsounded out across Velhalla. It was the sound of a drum beingbeaten, but it sounded like a drum of immense proportions, as ithad to be to make itself heard over the tumult of noise withwhich the hall was filled. The drum sounded three times, in slowand massive beats, like the heartbeat of the hall itself.

Dirk looked up to see where the sound might have comefrom. He noticed for the first time that at the south end of thehall, to which he had been heading, a great balcony or bridgeextended across most of its width. There were some figures upthere, dimly visible through the heat haze and the eagles, butDirk had a sense that whoever was up there presided overwhoever was down here.

Odin, thought Dirk. Odin the All-Father must be up on thebalcony.

The sound of the revels died down quickly, though it wasseveral seconds before the reverberations of the noise finally fellaway.

When all was quiet, but expectant, a great voice rang outfrom the balcony and through the hall.

The voice said, ‘”The time of the Challenging Hour is nearlyat an end. The Challenging Hour has been called by theGod Thor. For the third time of asking, where is Thor?”

A murmuring throughout the hall suggested that nobodyknew where Thor was and why he had not come to make hischallenge.

The voice said, “This is a very grave affront to the dignity ofthe All-Father. If there is no challenge before the expiration ofthe hour, the penalty for Thor shall be correspondingly grave.”

The drum beat again three times, and the consternation in thehall increased. Where was Thor?

“He’s with some girl,” said a voice above the rest, and therewere loud shouts of laughter, and a return to the hubbub ofbefore.

“Yes.” said Dirk, quietly, “I expect he probably is.”

“Oh ah.”

Dirk had supposed that he was talking to himself and wassurprised to have elicited a response from the man, though notparticularly surprised at the response that had been elicited.

“Thor called this meeting tonight?” Dirk asked him.

“Oh ah.”

“Bit rude not to turn up.”

“Oh ah.”

“I expect everyone’s n bit upset.”

“Not as long as there’s enough pigs to go round.”

“Pigs?”

“Oh ah.”

Dirk didn’t immediately know how to go on from here.

“Oh ah,” he said, resignedly.

“It’s only Thor as really cares, you see,” said the old man.”Keeps on issuing his challenge, then not being able to prove it.Can’t argue. Gets all confused and angry, does somethingstupid, can’t sort it out and gets made to do a penance.Everybody else just turns up for the pigs.”

“Oh ah.” Dirk was learning a whole new conversationaltechnique and was astonished at how successful it was. Heregarded the man with a new-found respect.

“Do you know how many stones there are in Wales?” askedthe man suddenly.

“Oh ah,” said Dirk warily. He didn’t know this joke.

“Nor do I. He won’t tell anybody. Says count ‘em yourselfand goes off in a sulk.”

“Oh ah.” He didn’t think it was a very good one.

“So this time he hasn’t even turned up. Can’t say I blamehim. But I’m sorry, because I think he might be right.”

“Oh ah.”

The man lapsed into silence.

Dirk waited.

“Oh ah,” he said again, hopefully.

Nothing.

“So, er,” said Dirk, going for a cautious prompt, “you thinkhe might be right, eh?”

“Oh ah.”

“So.Old Thor might be right, eh? That’s the story,” saidDirk.

“Oh ah.”

“In what way,” said Dirk, running out of patience at last, “doyou think he might be right?”

“Oh, every way.”

“Oh ah,” said Dirk, defeated.

“It’s no secret that the gods have fallen on hard times,” saidthe old man, grimly. “That’s clear for all to see, even for theones who only care about the pigs,which is most of ‘em. Andwhen you feel you’re not needed any more it can be hard tothink beyond the next pig,even if you used to have the wholeworld there with you. Everyone just accepts it as inevitable.Everyone except Thor, that is. And now he’s given up. Hasn’teven bothered to turn up and break a pig with us.Given up hischallenge. Oh ah.”

“Oh ah,” said Dirk.

“Oh ah.”

“So, er, Thor’s challenge then,” said Dirk tentatively.

“Oh ah.”

“What was it?”

“Oh ah.”

Dirk lost his patience entirely and rounded on the man.

“What was Thor’s challenge to Odin?” he insisted angrily.

The man looked round at him in slow surprise,lookcd him upand down with his big sagging eyes.

“You’re a mortal, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Dirk testily, “I’m a mortal. Of course I’m amortal. What has being a mortal got to do with it?”

“How did you get here?”

“I followed you.” He pulled the screwed up, empty cigarettepacket out of his pocket and put it on the table. “Thanks,” hesaid, “I owe you.”

It was a pretty feeble type of apology, he thought, but it wasthe best he could manage.

“Oh ah.” The man looked away.

“What was Thor’s challenge to Odin?” said Dirk, trying hardto keep the impatience out of his voice this time.

“What does it matter to you?” the old immortal said bitterly.”You’re a mortal. Why should you care? You’ve got what youwant out of it, you and your kind, for what little it’s now worth.”

“Got what we want out of what?”

“The deal,” said the old immortal. “The contract that Thorclaims Odin has entered into.”

“Contract?” said Dirk. “What contract?”

The man’s face filled with an expression of slow anger. Thebonfires of Valhalla danced deeply in his eyes as he looked atDirk.

“The sale,” he said darkly, “of an immortal soul.”

“What?” said Dirk. He had already considered this idea anddiscounted it. “You mean a man has sold his soul to him? Whatman? It doesn’t make sense.”

“No,” said the man, “that wouldn’t make sense at all. I saidan immortal soul. Thor says that Odin has sold his soul to Man.”

Dirk stared at him with horror and then slowly raised his eyesto the balcony. Something was happening there. The great drumbeat out again, and the hall of Valhalla began to hush itself oncemore. But a second or third drumbeat failed to come. Somethingunexpected seemed to have occurred, and the figures on thebalcony were moving in some confusion. The Challenging Hourwas just expiring, but a challenge of some kind seemed to havearrived.

Dirk beat his palms to his forehead and swayed where he satas all kinds of realisations finally dawned on him.

“Not to Man,” he said, “but to a man, and a woman. A lawyerand an advertiser. I said it was all her fault the moment I sawher. I didn’t realise I might actually be right.” He rounded on hiscompanion urgently. “I have to get up there,” he said, “for Gods’sake, help me.”

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 29

“O…dddddiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnn!!!!!!!”

Thor let out a bellow of rage which made the sky shake. Theheavy clouds let out a surprised grunt of thunder at the sheervolume of air that moved beneath them. Kate started back, whitewith fear and shock, with her ears ringing.

“Toe Rag!!!!”

He hurled his hammer to the ground right at his very feet withboth hands. He hurled it this short distance with such astoundingforce that it hit and rebounded into the air up to about a hundredfeet.

“Ggggrrrrrraaaaaaaah!!!!!!” With an immense explosion of airfrom his lungs he hurled himself up into the air after it, caught itjust as it was beginning to drop, and hurled it straight back downat the ground again, catching it again as it bounded back up,twisting violently round in mid-air and hurling it with all theforce he could muster out to sea before falling to the groundhimself on his back, and pounding the earth with his ankles,elbows and fists in an incredible tattoo of rage.

The hammer shot out over the sea on a very low trajectory.The head went down into the water and planed through it at aconstant depth of about six inches. A sharp ripple opened slowlybut easily across its surface, extending eventually to about amile as the hammer sliced its way through it like a surgeon’sknife. The inner walls of the ripple deepened smoothly in itswake, falling away from the sheer force of the hammer, till avast valley had opened in the face of the sea. The walls of thevalley wobbled and swayed uncertainly, then folded up andcrashed together in crazed and foaming tumult. The hammerlifted its head and swung up high into the air. Thor leapt to hisfeet and watched it, still pounding his feet on the ground like aboxer, but like a boxer who was perhaps about to precipitate amajor earthquake. When the hammer reached the top of itstrajectory, Thor hurled his fist downwards like a conductor, andthe hammer hurtled down into the crashing mass of sea.

That seemed to calm the sea for a moment in the same waythat a smack in the face will calm a hysteric. The momentpassed. An immense column of watcr crupted out of the smack,and seconds later the hammer exploded upwards out of itscentre, pulling another huge column of water up from the middleof the first one.

The hammer somersaulted at the top of its rise, turned,

spun,and rushed back to its owner like a wildly over-excited puppy.Thor caught at it, but instead of stopping it he allowed it to carryhim backwards, and together they tumbled back through therocks for about a hundred yards and scuffled to a halt in somesoft earth.

Instantly, Thor was back on his feet again. He turned roundand round, bounding from one leg to the other with strides ofnearly ten feet, swinging the hammer round him at arm's length.When he released it again it raced out to sea once more, but thistime it tore round the surface in a giant semicircle, causing thesea to rear up around its circumference to form for a moment agigantic amphitheatre of water. When it fell forward it crashedlike a tidal wave, ran forward and threw itself, enraged, againstthe short wall of the cliff.

The hammer returned to Thor, who threw it off againinstantly in a great overarm. It flew into a rock, hitting off a fatangry spark. It bounded off further and hit a spark off anotherrock, and another. Thor threw himself forward on to his knees,and with each rock the hammer hit he pounded the ground withhis fist to make the rock rise to meet the hammer. Spark afterspark erupted from the rocks. The hammer hit each successiveone harder and harder, until one spark provoked a warning lickof lightning from the clouds.

And then the sky began to move, slowly, like a great angryanimal uncoiling in its lair. The pounding sparks flew faster andheavier from the hammer, more lightning licks arced down tomeet them from the sky, and the whole earth was beginning totremble in something very like fearful excitement.

Thor hauled his elbows up above his head and then thrustthem hard down with another ringing bellow at the sky.

"O…ddddiiiiiiinnnnnn!!!!"

The sky seemed about to crack open.

"Toe Raaaaaggggggggg!!!!!!!!!"

Thor throw himself into the ground, heaving aside about twoskipsful of rocky carth. He shook with expanding rage. With adeep groan the whole of the side of the cliff began slowly to leanforward into the sea as he pushed and shook. In a few secondsmore it tumbled heavily into the seething torment beneath it asThor clambered back, seized a rock the size of a grand piano andheld it above his head.

Everything seemed still for a fleeting moment.

Thor hurled the rock into the sea.

He regained his hammer.

"O…!" he bellowed.

“…Ddddddddinnnnnnn!!!!!!!!!!”

His hammer cracked down.

A torrent of water erupted from the ground, and the skyexploded. Lightning flickered down like a white wall of light formiles along the coast in either direction. Thunder roared likecolliding worlds and the clouds vomited rain that shattered theground. Thor stood exulting in the torrent.

A few minutes later and the violence abated. A strong andsteady rain continued to fall. The clouds were cleansingthemselves and the weak rays of the early morning light beganto find their way through the thinning cover.

Thor trudged back up from where he had been standing,slapping and washing the mud from his hands. He caught at hishammer when it flew to him.

He found Kate standing watching him, shivering withastonishment, fear and fury.

“What was that all about?” she yelled at him.

“I just needed to be able to lose my temper properly,” he said.When this didn’t seem to satisfy her he added, “A god can showoff once in a while can’t he?”

The huddled figure of Tsuliwansis came hurrying outthrough the rain towards them.

“You’re a noisy boy, Thor,” she scolded, “a noisy boy.”

But Thor was gone. When they looked, they guessed that hemust be the tiny speck hurtling northwards through the clearingsky.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 30

Cynthia Draycott peered over the balcony at the sceene belowthem with distaste. Valhalla was back in full swing.

“I hate this,” she said, “I don’t want this going on in my life.”

“You don’t have to, my darling,” said Clive Draycott quietlyfrom behind her, with his hands on her shoulders. “It’s all goingto be taken care of right now, and it’s going to work out justfine. Couldn’t be better in fact. It’s just what we wanted. Youknow, you look fantastic in those glasses? They really suit you. Imean really. They’re very chic.”

“Clive, it was meant to have been taken care of originally.The whole point was that we weren’t to be troubled, we couldjust do it, deal with it, and forget about it. That was the wholepoint. I’ve put up with enough shit in my life. I just wanted it tobe good, 100 per cent. I don’t want all this.”

“Exactly. And that’s why this is so perfect for us. So perfect.Clear breach of contract. We get everything we wanted now, andwe’re released from all obligations. Perfecto. We come out of itsmelling of roses, and we have a life that is just 100 per centgood. 100 per cent. And clean. Just exactly as you wanted it.Really, it couldn’t be better for us. Trust me.”

Cynthia Draycott hugged herself irritably.

“So what about this new…person? Something else we have todeal with.”

“It’ll be so easy. So easy. Listen, this is nothing. We eithercut him in to it, or we cut him right out. It’ll be taken care ofbefore we leave here. We’ll buy him something. A new coat.Maybe we’ll have to buy him a new house. Know what that’llcost us?” He gave a charming laugh. “It’s nothing. You won’tever even need to think about it. You won’t ever even need tothink about not thinking about it. It’s… that… easy. OK?”

“Hm.”

“OK. I’ll be right back.”

He turned and headed back into the ante-chamber of the hallof the All-Fattier, smiling all the way.

“So, Mr… ” he made a show of looking at the card again”… Gently. You want to act for these people do you?”

“These immortal gods,” said Dirk.

“OK, gods,” said Draycott. “‘That’s fine. Perhaps you’ll do abetter job than the manic little hustler I had to deal with firsttime out. You know, he’s really quite a little character, our MrRag, Mr Rag. You know, that guy was really quite amazing.

Hedid everything he could, tried every oldest trick in the book tofreak me out, and give me the run-around. You know how I dealwith people like that? Simple. I ignore it. I just…ignone it. If hewants to play around and threaten and screech, and shovel infive hundred and seventeen subclauses that he thinks he's goingto catch me out on, that's OK. He's just taking up time, but sowhat? I've got time. I've got plenty of time for people like MrRag. Because you know what the really crazy thing is? Youknow what's really crazy? The guy cannot draw up an actualcontract to save his life. Really. To save…his…life. And I tellyou something, that's fine by me. He can thrash around and spitall he likes - when he gets tired I just reel him in. Listen. I drawup contracts in the recond business. These guys are just minnowsby comparison. They're primitive savages. You've met them.You've dealt with them. They're primitive savages. Well, aren'tthey? Like the Red Indians. They don't even know what they'vegot. You know, these people are lucky they didn't meet somereal shark. I mean it. You know what America cost? You knowwhat the whole United States of America actually cost? Youdon't, and neither do I. And shall I tell you why? The sum is sonegligible that someone could tell us what it was and twominutes later we would have forgotten. It would have gone cleanout of our minds.

"Now, compared with that, let me tell you, I am providing. Iam really providing. A private suite in the Woodshead Hospital? Lavish attention, food, sensational quantities of linen.Sensational. You could practically buy the United States ofAmerica at today's prices for what that's all costing. But youknow what? I said, if he wants the linen, let him have the linen.Just let him have it. It's fine. The guy's earned it. He can haveall the linen…he…wants. Just don't fuck with me is all.

"Now let me tell you, this guy has a nice life. A nice life. AndI think that's what we all want, isn't it. A nice life. This guycertainly did. And he didn't know how to have it. None of theseguys did. They're just kind of helpless in the modern world. It'skind of tough for them and I'm just trying to help out. Let metell you how nave they are, and I mean nave.

"My wife, Cynthia, you've met her, and let me tell you, she isthe best. I tell you, my relationship with Cynthia is so good- "

"I don't want to hear about your relationship with your wife."

"OK. That's fine. That's absolutely fine. I just think maybeit's worth you getting to know a few things. But whatever youwant is fine. OK. Cynthia's in advertising. You know that. Sheis a senior partner in a major agency. Major. They did some bigcampaign,

really big, a few years back in which some actor isplaying a god in this commercial. And he's endorsing some-thing, I don't know, a soft drink, you know, tooth rot for kids.

And Odin at this time is just a down and out. He's living onthe streets. He simply can't get anything together, because he'sjust not for this world. All that power, but he doesn'tknow how to make it work for him here, today. Now here's thecrazy part.

"Odin sees this commercial on the television and he thinks tohimself, `Hey, I could do that, I'm a god.' He thinks maybe hecould get paid for being in a commercial. And you know whatthat would be. Pays even less than the United States of Americacost, you follow me? Think about it. Odin, the chief and fount ofall the power of all of the Norse gods, thinks he might be able toget paid for being in a television commercial to sell soft drinks.

"And this guy, this god, literally goes out and tries to findsomeone who'll let him in a TV commercial. Pathetically nave.But also greedy - let's not forget greedy.

"Anyway, he happens to come to Cynthia's attention. She'sjust a lowly account executive at the time, doesn't pay anyattention, thinks he's just a whacko, but then she gets kind offascinated by how odd he is, and I get to see him. And you knowwhat? It dawns on us he's for real. The guy is for real. A realactual god with the whole panoply of divine powers. And notonly a god, but like, the main one. The one all the others dependon for their power. And he wants to be in a commercial. Let'sjust say the word again shall we? A commercial.

"The idea was dumbfounding. Didn't the guy know what hehad? Didn't he realise what his power could get him?

"Apparently not. I have to tell you, this was the mostastounding moment in our lives. A…stoun…ding. Let me tellyou, Cynthia and I have always known that we were, well,special people, and that something special would happen to us,and here it was. Something special.

"But look. We're not greedy. We don't want all that power,all that wealth. And I mean, we're looking at the world here.The whole…fucking…world. We could own the world if wewanted to. But who wants to own the world? Think of thetrouble. We don't even want huge wealth, all those lawyersaccountants to deal with, and let me tell you I'm a layer. OK,so you can hire people to look after your lawyers andaccountants for you, but who are those people going to be? Justmore lawyers and accountants. And you know, we don't evenwant the responsibility for it all. It's too much.

“So then I have this idea. It’s like you buy a big property, andthen you sell on what you don’t want. That way you get whatyou want, and a lot of other people get what they want, onlythey get it through you, and they feel a little obligated to you,and they remember who they got it through because they sign apiece of paper which says how obligated they feel to you. Andmoney flows back to pay for our Mr Odin’s very, very, veryexpensive private medical care.

“So we don’t have much, Mr Gently. One or two modestlynice houses. One or two modestly nice cars. We have a very nicelife. Very, very nice indeed. We don’t need much becauseanything we need is always made available to us, it’s taken careof. All we demanded, and it was a very reasonable demand inthe circumstances, was that we didn’t want to know any moreabout it. We take our modest requirements and we bow out. Wewant nothing more than absolute peace and absolute quiet, and anice life because Cynthia’s sometimes a little nervous. OK.

“And then what happens this morning? Right on our owndoorstep. Pow. It’s disgusting. I mean it is really a disgustinglittle number. And you know how it happened?

“Here’s how it happened. It’s our friend Mr Rag again, andhe’s tried to be a clever tricky little voodoo lawyer. It’s sopathetic. He has fun trying to waste my time with all his littletricks and games and run-arounds, and then he tries to faze meby presenting me with a bill for his time. That’s nothing. It’swork creation. All lawyers do it. OK. So I say, I’ll take your bill.I’ll take it, I don’t care what it is. You give me your bill and I’llsee it’s taken care of. It’s OK. So he gives it to me.

“It’s only later I see it’s got this tricky kind of subtotal thingin it. So what? He’s trying to be clever. He’s given me a hotpotato. Listen, the record business is full of hot potatoes. Youjust get them taken care of. There are always people happy totake care of things for you when they want to make their way upthe ladder. If they’re worthy of their place on the ladder, well,they’ll get it taken care of in return. You get a hot potato, youpass it on. I passed it on. Listen, there were a lot of people whoare very happy to get things taken care of for me. Hey, youknow? It was really funny seeing how far and how fast thatparticular potato got passed on. That told me a lot about whowas bright and who was not. But then it lands up in my backgarden, and that’s a penalty clause job I’m afraid. TheWoodshead stuff is a very expensive little number, and I thinkyour clients may have blown it on that particular score. We havethe whip hand here. We can just cancel this whole thing. Believeme, I have everything I could possibly

want now.

“But listen, Mr Gently. I think you understand my position.We’ve been pretty frank with each other and I’ve felt goodabout that. There are certain sensitivities involved, of course,and I’m also in a position to be able to make a lot of thingshappen. So perhaps we can come to any one of a number ofpossible accommodations. Anything you want, Mr Gently, it canbe made to happen.”

“Just to see you dead, Mr Draycott,” said Dirk Gently, “justto see you dead.”

“Well fuck you, too.”

Dirk Gently turned and left the room and went to tell his newclient that he thought they might have a problem.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 31

A tittle while later a dark-blue BMVV pulled quietly nway franthe otherwise deserted forecourt of St Pancras stadon and movedoff up the quiet streets.

Somewhat dejected, Dirk Gently put on his hat and left hisnewly acquired and newly relinquished client who said that hewished to be alone now and maybe turn into a rat or somethinglike some other people he could mention.

He closed the great doors behind him and walked slowly outon to the balcony overlooking the great vaulted hall of gods andheroes, Valhalla. He arrived just as the last few stragglers of therevels were fading away, presumably to emerge at the samemoment in the great vaulted train shed of St Pancras station. Hestayed staring for a while at the empty hall, in which the bonfiresnow were just fading embers.

It then took the very slightest flicker of his head for him toperform the same transition himself, and he found himselfstanding in a gusty and dishevelled corridor of the emptyMidland Grand Hotel. Out in the great dark concourse of StPancras station he saw again the last stragglers from Valhallashuffling away and out into the cold streets of London to findbenches that were designed not to be slept on, and to try to sleepon them.

He sighed and tried to find his way out of the derelict hotel, atask that proved more difficult than he anticipated, as immenseand as dark and as labyrinthine as it was. He found at last thegreat winding gothic staircase which led all the way down to thehuge arches of the entrance lobby, decorated with carvings ofdragons and griffins and heavy ornamental ironwork. The mainfront entrance was locked as it had been for years, andeventually Dirk found his way down a side corridor to an exitmanned by a great sweaty splodge of a man who guarded it atnight. He demanded to know how Dirk had gained entrance tothe hotel and refused to be satisfied by any of his explanations.In the end he had simply to allow Dirk to leave, since there waslittle else he could do.

Dirk crossed from this entrance to the entrance into thestation booking hall, and then into the station itself. For a whilehe simply stood there looking around, and then he left via themain station entrance, and descended the steps which led downon to the St Pancras Road. As he emerged on to the street he wasso surprised not to be instantly swooped upon by a passing eaglethat he

tripped and stumbled and was run over by the first of theearly morning's motorcycle couriers.

Dirk Gently 2 - The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Chapter 32

With a huge crash, Thor surged through the wall at the far end ofthe great hall of Valhalla and stood ready to proclaim to theassembled gods and heroes that he had finally managed to breakthrough to Norway and had found a copy of the contract Odinhad signed buried deep in the side of a mountain, but he couldn'tbecause they'd all gone and there was no one there.

"There's no one here," he said to Kate, releasing her from hishuge grip, "they've all gone."

He slumped in disappointment.

"Wh - " said Kate.

"We'll try the old man's chambers," said Thor and hurled hishammer up to the balcony, with themselves in tow.

He stalked through the great chambers, ignoring Kate's pleas,protests and general abuse.

He wasn't there.

"He's here somewhere," said Thor angrily, trailing hishammer behind him.

"We'll go through the world divide," he said, and took holdof Kate again. They flicked themselves through.

They were in a large bedroom suite in the hotel.

Litter and scraps of rotting carpet covered the floors, thewindows were grimy with years of neglect. Pigeon droppingswere everywhere, and the peeling paintwork made it look as ifseveral small families of starfish had exploded on the walls.

Thene was an abandoned trolleybed in the middle of the floorin which an old man lay in beautifully laundered linen, weepingfrom his one remaining eye.

"I found the contract, you bastard," raged Thor, waving it athim. "I found the deal you did. You sold all our power to…to alawyer and a…an advertiser and, and all sorts of other people.You stole our power! You couldn't steal all of mine because I'mtoo strong, but you kept me bewildered and confused, and madebad things happen every time I got angry. You prevented megetting back home to Norway by every method you could,because you knew I'd find this! You and that poison dwarf ToeRag. You've been abusing and humiliating me for years, and - "

"Yes, yes, we know all that," said Odin.

"Well…Good!"

"Thor - " said Kate.

“Well I’ve shaken all that off now!” shouted Thor.

“Yes, I see - “

“I went somewhere I could get good and angry in pence,when I knew you’d be otherwise occupied and expecting me tobe here, and I had a hell of a good shout and blew things up abit, and I’m all right now! And I’m going to tear this up for astart!”

He ripped right through the contract, threw the pieces in theair and incinerated them with a look.

“Thor - ” said Kate.

“And I’m going to put right all the things you made happenso I’d be afraid of getting angry. The poor girl at the airlinecheck-in desk that got turned into a drink machine. Woof!Wham! She’s back! The jet fighter that tried to shoot me downwhen I was flying to Norway! Woof! Wham! It’s back! See, I’mback in control of myself!”

“What jet fighter?” asked Kate. “You haven’t told meabout a jet fighter.”

“It tried to shoot me down over the North Sea. We had ascrap and in the heat of the moment I, well, I turned it intoan eagle, and it’s been bothering me ever since. So nowthat’s dealt with. Don’t look at me like that. I did what Icould. I took care of his wife by fixing one of those lotterythings. Look,” he added angrily, “all this has been very dif-ficult for me, you know. All right. What else?”

“My table lamp,” said Kate quietly.

“And Kate’s table lamp! It shall be a small kitten no more! Woof! Wham! Thor speaks and it is so! What was that noise?”

A ruddy glow was spreading across the London skyline.

Thor, I think there’s something wrong with your father.”

“I should bloody well hope so. Oh. What’s wrong? Father?Are you all right?”

“I have been so very, very foolish and unwise,” wept Odin, “Ihave been so wicked and evil, and - “

“Yes, well that’s what I think, too,” said Thor and sat on thecnd of his bed. “So what are we going to do?”

“I don’t think I could live without my linen, and my SisterBailey, and… It’s been so, so, so long, and I’m so, so old. ToeRag said I should kill you, but I…I would rather have killedmyself. Oh, Thor…”

“Oh,” said Thor. “I see. Well. I don’t know what to do now.Blast. Blast everything.”

“Thor -“

“Yes, yes, what is it?”

“Thor, it’s very simple what you do about your father and

theWoodshead," said Kate.

"Oh yes? What then?"

"I'll tell you on one condition."

"Oh really? And what's that?"

"That you tell me how many stones there are in Wales."

"What!" exclaimed Thor in outrage. "Away from me! That'syears of my life you're talking about!"

Kate shrugged.

"No!" said Thor. "Anything but that! Anyway, he addedsullenly, "I told you."

"No you didn't."

"Yes I did. I said I lost count somewhere in Mid-Glamorgan.Well, I was hardly going to start again, was I? Think, girl,think!Chapter 33

Beating a path through the difficult territory to the north-east ofValhalla - a network of paths that seemed to lead only to otherpaths and then back to the first paths again for another try - wenttwo figures, one a big, stupid, violent creature with green eyesand a scythe which hung from its belt and often seriously imped-ed its progress, the other a small crazed creature who clung on tothe back of the bigger one, manically urging him on white actu-aily impeding his progress still further.

They attained at last a long, low, smelly building into whichthey hurried shouting for horses. The old stable master cameforward, recognised them and, having heard already of theirdisgrace, was at first disinclined to help them on their way. 'Thescythe flashed through the air and the stable master's headstarted upwards in surprise while his body took an affronted stepbackwards, swayed uncertainly, and then for lack of any furtherinstructions to the contrary keeled over backwards in its owntime. His head bounded into the hay.

His assailants hurriedly lashed up two horses to a cart andclattered away out of the stable yard and along the broaderthoroughfare which led upwards to the north.

They made rapid progress up the road for a mile, Toe Ragurging the horses on frantically with a long and cruel whip.After a few minutes, however, the horses began to slow downand to look about them uneasily. Toe Rag lashed them all theharder, but they became more anxious still then suddenly lost allcontrol and reared in terror, turning over the cart and tipping itsoccupants out on the ground, from which they instantly sprangup in a rage.

Toe Rag screamed at the terrified horses and then, out of thecorner of his eye, caught sight of what had so disturbed them.

It wasn’t so terrifying. It was just a large, white, metal box,upturned on a pile of rubbish by the roadside and rattling itself.

The horses were rearing and trying to bolt away from the bigwhite rattling thing but they were impossibly entangled in theirtraces. They were only working themselves up into a thrashinglather of panic. Toe Rag quickly realised that there would be nocalming them until the box was dealt with.

“Whatever it is,” he screeched at the green-eyed creature,”kill it!”

Green-eye unhooked his scythe from his belt once more andclambered up the pile of rubbish to where the box was rattling.He kicked it and it only rattled the more. He got his foot behindit and with a heavy thrust shoved it away down the heap. Thebig white box slithered a foot or so then turned over and toppledto the ground. It rested there for a moment and then a door,finally freed, flew open. The horses screamed in fear.

Toe Rag and his green-eyed thug approached the thing withworried curiosity, then staggered back in horror as a great andpowerful new god erupted from its innards.

Chapter 34

The following afternoon, at a comfortable distance from alIthese events, set at a comfortable distance from a well-proportioned window through which the afternoon light wasstreaming, lay an elderly one-eyed man in a white bed. Anewspaper sat like a half-collapsed tent on the floor, where ithad been hurled two minutes before.

The man was awake but not glad to be. His exquisitely frailhands lay slightly curled on the pure white linen sheets andquivered very faintly.

His name was variously given as Mr Odwin, or Wodin, orOdin. He was - is - a god, and furthermore he was a confusedand startled god.

He was confused and startled because of the report he hadjust been reading on the front page of the newspaper, which wasthat another god had been cutting loose and making a nuisanceof himself. It didn’t say so in so many words of course, it merelydescribed what had happened last night when a missing jetfighter aircraft had mysteriously erupted under full power fromout of a house in North London into which it could notconceivably have been thought to have fitted. It had instantlylost its wings and gone into a screaming dive and crashed andexploded in a main road. The pilot had managed to eject duringthe few seconds he had had in the air, and had landed,

shaken,bruised, but otherwise unharmed, and babbling about strangemen with hammers flying over the North Sea.

Luckily, because of the time at which the inexplicabledisaster had occurred, the roads were almost deserted, and apartfrom massive damage to property, the only fatalities to haveoccurred were the as yet unidentified occupants of a car whichwas thought to have been possibly a BMW and possibly blue,though because of the rather extreme nature of the accidcnt itwas rather hard to tell.

He was very, very tired and did not want to think about it,did not want to think about last night, did not want to think ofanything other than linen sheets and how wonderful it was whenSister Bailey patted them down around him as she had just now,just five minutes ago, and again just ten minutes before that.

The American girl, Kate something, came into his room. Hewished she would just let him sleep. She was going on aboutsomething being all fixed up. She congratulated him on havingextremely high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and avery dicky heart, as a consequence of which the hospital wouldbe very glad to accept him as a lifelong patient in return for hisentire estate. They didn't even care to know what his estate wasworth, because it would clearly be sufficient to cover a stay asbrief as his was likely to be.

She seemed to expect him to be pleased, so he noddedamiably, thanked her vaguely and drifted, drifted happily off tosleep.

Chapter 35

The same afternoon Dirk Gently awake, also in hospital,suffering from mild concussion, scrapes and bruises and abroken leg. He had had the greatest difficulty in explaining, onadmittance, that most of his injuries had been caused by a smallboy and an eagle, and that really, being run over by a motorcyclecourier was a relatively restful experience since it mostlyinvolved lying down a lot and not being swooped on every twominutes.

He was kept under sedation - in other words, he slept - formost of the morning, suffering terrible dreams in which Toe Ragand a green-eyed, scythe-bearing giant made their escape to thenorth-east from Valhalla, where they were unexpectedlyaccosted and consumed by a newly created, immense Guilt Godwhich had finally escaped from what looked suspiciously like anupturned refrigerator on a skip.

He was relieved to be woken at last from this by a cheery,"Oh it's you, is it? You nicked my book."

He opened his eyes and was greeted by the sight of SallyMills, the girl he had been violently accosted by the previousday in the

caf, for no better reason than that he had, prior tonicking her book, nicked her coffee.

"Well, I'm glad to see you took my advice and came in tohave your nose properly attended to," she said as she fussedaround him. "Pretty roundabout way you seem to have takenbut you're here and that's the main thing. You caught up withthe girl you were interested in did you? Oddly enough, you're inthe very bed that she was in. If you see her again, perhaps youcould give her this pizza which she arranged to have deliveredbefore checking herself out. It's all cold now, but the courier didinsist that she was very adamant it should be delivered.

"I don't mind you nicking the book, really, though. I don'tknow why I buy them really, they're not very good, onlyeveryone always does, don't they? Somebody told me there's arumour he had entered into a pact with the devil or something. Ithink that's nonsense, though I did hear another story about himwhich I much preferred. Apparently he's always having thesemysterious deliveries of chickens to his hotel rooms, and no onedares to ask why or even guess what it is he wants them for,because nobody ever sees a single scrap of them again. Well, Imet somebody who knows exactly what he wants them for. Thesomebody I met once had the job of secretly smuggling thechickens straight back out of his rooms again. What HowardBelt gets out of it is a reputation for being a very strange anddemonic man and everybody buys his books. Nice work if youcan get it is what I say. Anyway, I expect you don't want to haveme nattering to you alt afternoon, and even if you do I've gotbetter things to do. Sister says you'll probably be discharged thisevening so you can go to your own home and sleep in your ownbed, which I'm sure you'll much prefer. Anyway, hope you feelbetter, here's a couple of newspapers."

Dirk took the papers, glad to be left alone at last.

He first turned to see what The Great Zaganza had to sayabout his day. The Great Zaganza said, "You are very fat andstupid and persistently wear a ridiculous hat which you shouldbe ashamed of."

He grunted slightly to himself about this, and turned to the horoscope in the other paper.

It said, "Today is a day to enjoy home comforts."

Yes, he thought, he would be glad to get back home. He wasstill strangely relieved about getting rid of his old fridgelooked forwand to enjoying a new phase of fridge ownershipwith the spanking new model currently sitting in his kitchen athome.

Then was the eagle to think about, but he would worry aboutthat later, when he got home.

He turned to the front page to see if there was any interestingnews.ÜÜÜ

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_ÿÿÕ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿV?_ÿÿ-?_ÿÿÙ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ[?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿâ?
_ÿÿ_____<_â?_-?_ÿÿ2?
_ÿÿM?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÈ?_ÿÿ _ÿÿF _ÿÿ ÿÿ1/4 _ÿÿø
_ÿÿ_____<_ø
_9¡_ÿÿy¡_ÿÿµ¡_ÿÿ÷¡_ÿÿ6¢_ÿÿ>¢_ÿÿ?¢_ÿÿÁ¢_ÿÿþ
¢_ÿÿ8£_ÿÿ_____<_8£l
£ÿÿ|£ÿÿ3/4£_ÿÿý£_ÿÿ>¤_ÿÿq¤_ÿÿ²¤_ÿÿñ¤_ÿÿ4¥_ÿÿn
¥_ÿÿ_____<_n¥(r)¥_ÿÿé
¥_ÿÿ'¦_ÿÿg¦_ÿÿ?¦_ÿÿ?¦_ÿÿÛ¦_ÿÿ_§_ÿÿ`§_ÿÿ?
§_ÿÿ_____<_?
§_Ò§_ÿÿ¨_ÿÿO¨_ÿÿ"¨_ÿÿÒ¨_ÿÿ_(c)ÿÿS(c)ÿÿg(c)_ÿÿ"(c)ÿÿÕ(c)_ÿÿ_____
ªÿÿ1/2ª_ÿÿþª_ÿÿ?"_ÿÿy"_ÿÿº"_ÿÿú"_ÿÿ8¬_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿK_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿÌ_ÿÿ(r)ÿÿM(r)ÿÿ(r)_ÿÿ_____<
°_ÿÿV°_ÿÿ-°_ÿÿÕ
°_ÿÿ_____<_Õ°__±_ÿÿS
±_ÿÿ±_ÿÿÔ±_ÿÿñ
±_ÿÿ*²_ÿÿj²_ÿÿ¦²_ÿÿè²_ÿÿ(³_ÿÿ_____
´_ÿÿ_´_ÿÿ´_ÿÿÚ´_ÿÿ_µ_ÿÿ]µ_ÿÿ?

µ_ÿÿ_____<_?
µ_Ùµ_ÿÿ_¶_ÿÿ-¶_ÿÿ`¶_ÿÿ?
¶_ÿÿÊ¶_ÿÿ·_ÿÿH·_ÿÿ·_ÿÿÇ·_ÿÿ_____
¸_ÿÿf¸_ÿÿ¤¸_ÿÿß¸_ÿÿó¸_ÿÿ-
¹_ÿÿm¹ÿÿ(c)¹_ÿÿ_____<_(c)¹_æ¹_
°º_ÿÿîº_ÿÿ.”_ÿÿo”_ÿÿ¦”_ÿÿÖ”_ÿÿ_____?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Ö”_1/4ÿÿW1/4_ÿÿ-1/4ÿÿÏ1/4_ÿÿ_1/2ÿÿD1/2ÿÿ…
1/2ÿÿÆ1/2_ÿÿ_3/4ÿÿ<3/4_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_<3/4z3/4ÿÿ¸3/4ÿÿ×3/4_ÿÿ_¿_ÿÿ_¿_ÿÿ]¿_ÿÿ?
¿_ÿÿØ¿_ÿÿ_À_ÿÿ\À_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_\À_?À_ÿÿÛÀ_ÿÿýÀ_ÿÿ3Á_ÿÿOÁ_ÿÿ?
Á_ÿÿÓÁ_ÿÿ_Â_ÿÿRÂ_ÿÿÂ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Â_×Â_ÿÿ_Ã_ÿÿVÃ_ÿÿ”Ãÿÿ1/2Ã_ÿÿûÃ_ÿÿ8Ä_ÿÿzÄ_ÿÿºÄ_ÿÿýÄ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ýÄ7Åÿÿÿ¸Åÿÿ¸Åÿÿ¸Åÿÿù<Æÿÿ?
Æÿÿ3/4Æ_ÿÿÕÆ_ÿÿ_Ç_ÿÿGÇ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_GÇ~ÇÿÿºÇÿÿýÇÿÿCÈÿÿ…
Èÿÿ(tm)È_ÿÿÌÈ_ÿÿÉ_ÿÿRÉ_ÿÿ”É_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_”É_ÔÉ_ÿÿ_Ê_ÿÿSÊ_ÿÿ’Ê_ÿÿÔÊ_ÿÿ_Ë_ÿÿQË_ÿÿ”Ë_ÿÿÉË_ÿÿÌ_ÿÿ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
Ì_QÌ_ÿÿ”Ì_ÿÿÔÌ_ÿÿ_Í_ÿÿNÍ_ÿÿÍ_ÿÿÄÍ_ÿÿ_Î_ÿÿ(Î_ÿÿeÎ_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_eÎ_
¥Î_ÿÿâÎ_ÿÿ”Ï_ÿÿgÏ_ÿÿ¤Ï_ÿÿÚÏ_ÿÿ_Ð_ÿÿUÐ_ÿÿ’Ð_ÿÿÏÐ_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ÏÐ__Ñ_ÿÿQÑ_ÿÿ’Ñ_ÿÿÐÑ_ÿÿìÑ_ÿÿîÑ_ÿÿ)Ò_ÿÿjÒ_ÿÿ”Ò_ÿÿìÒ_ÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ìÒ_0Ó_ÿÿmÓ_ÿÿÓ_ÿÿéÓ_ÿÿ)Ô_ÿÿ1Ô_ÿÿqÔ_ÿÿ
˚Ô_ÿÿèÔ_ÿÿ%Õ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_%Õ_dÕ_ÿÿ§Õ_ÿÿéÕ_ÿÿûÕ_ÿÿ6Ö_ÿÿtÖ_ÿÿ
˚Ö_ÿÿâÖ_ÿÿ_×_ÿÿ_×_ÿÿ_____<
Ø_ÿÿ;Ø_ÿÿxØ_ÿÿ¸Ø_ÿÿøØ_ÿÿ_____
Ù_ÿÿÔÙ_ÿÿëÙ_ÿÿ*Ú_ÿÿ8Ú_ÿÿ9Ú_ÿÿDÚ_x_FÚ_ÿÿ_____
Lð__?Lð_<_FÚ_HÚ_ÿÿJÚ_ÿÿ?
Ú_ÿÿÑÚ_ÿÿ_Û_ÿÿ8Û_ÿÿvÛ_ÿÿ¸Û_ÿÿÛÛ_ÿÿ_Ü_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Ü__Ü_ÿÿÜ_ÿÿÛÜ_ÿÿ_Ý_ÿÿ^Ý_ÿÿ¢Ý_ÿÿ
˚Ý_ÿÿóÝ_ÿÿ7Þ_ÿÿrÞ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_rÞ_´Þ_ÿÿòÞ_ÿÿ3ß_ÿÿsß_ÿÿ”ß_ÿÿåß_ÿÿ
$à_ÿÿ`à_ÿÿà_ÿÿÙà_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Ùà__á_ÿÿVá_ÿÿ-á_ÿÿÕá_ÿÿ_âÿÿ

+âÿÿXâÿÿ(tm)â_ÿÿÝâ_ÿÿ_ã_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ã_]ã_ÿÿã_ÿÿÜã_ÿÿåã_ÿÿ)äÿÿjäÿÿ(r)ä_ÿÿòä_ÿÿ'å_ÿÿfå_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_få
¤åÿÿéåÿÿ(æÿÿjæÿÿ¨æÿÿåæÿÿ%çÿÿXçÿÿ(tm)ç_ÿÿÙç_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_Ùç__è_ÿÿXè_ÿÿ-
è_ÿÿ×è_ÿÿ_é_ÿÿUé_ÿÿé_ÿÿ×é_ÿÿ_ê_ÿÿQê_ÿÿ_____
ê_ÿÿ¦ê_ÿÿåê_ÿÿ&ë_ÿÿbë_ÿÿ ë_ÿÿÝë_ÿÿ_ì_ÿÿUì_ÿÿ-
ì_ÿÿ_____<_-
ì_×ì_ÿÿÝì_ÿÿ_í_ÿÿ[í_ÿÿí_ÿÿÚí_ÿÿæí_ÿÿ
%î_ÿÿ`î_ÿÿ¡î_ÿÿ_____<_¡î_âî_ÿÿ
ï_ÿÿÆï_ÿÿ_ð_ÿÿ@ð_ÿÿð_ÿÿ¡ð_ÿÿÓð_ÿÿ_____
ñ_ÿÿ¨ñ_ÿÿåñ_ÿÿò_ÿÿ_ò_ÿÿvò_ÿÿ¹ò_ÿÿ_____
ô_ÿÿ_ô_ÿÿ?
ô_ÿÿ_____<_?
ô_×ô_ÿÿ_õ_ÿÿUõ_ÿÿ?õ_ÿÿÐõ_ÿÿ_ö_ÿÿ_ö_ÿÿYö_ÿÿ?
ö_ÿÿßö_ÿÿ_____<_ßö__÷_ÿÿ^÷
÷_ÿÿá÷_ÿÿ"ø_ÿÿcø_ÿÿø_ÿÿ
´ø_ÿÿòø_ÿÿ.ù_ÿÿ_____<_.ù_où_
ý_ÿÿ?ý_ÿÿ?
ý_ÿÿ_____<_?ý_?
ý_ÿÿý_x_?ý_ÿÿ?ý_ÿÿ ý_ÿÿ¢ý_ÿÿ
¤ý_ÿÿ¦ý_ÿÿ¨ý_ÿÿæý_ÿÿ_____<_æ
ÿ_ÿÿ_ÿ_ÿÿÿ_ÿÿØÿ_ÿÿ__ÿÿ@__ÿÿ_____
±__ÿÿò__ÿÿ2__ÿÿp__ÿÿ¯__ÿÿð__ÿÿû__ÿÿ:__ÿÿy__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿ]__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿ¨__ÿÿ_____<_¨__ç__ÿÿ__ÿÿ,_
__ÿÿa__ÿÿ¢__ÿÿ_____<_
¢__à__ÿÿ _ÿÿd_ÿÿ£_ÿÿ³_ÿÿñ_ÿÿ2__ÿÿo__ÿÿ
°__ÿÿÌ__ÿÿ_____?Lð__?Lð_<_Ì__
_ÿÿG _ÿÿ _ÿÿÈ _ÿÿ
_ÿÿH_ÿÿ_ÿÿÌ_ÿÿê_ÿÿ__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<___>_ÿÿv_ÿÿ²_ÿÿõ_ÿÿ_ÿÿ_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿß_ÿÿî_ÿÿ-_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_-_h_ÿÿ¥_ÿÿä_ÿÿ_ÿÿ_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿÚ_ÿÿã_ÿÿ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<___?
__ÿÿ×__ÿÿ__ÿÿ"__ÿÿL__ÿÿv__ÿÿ¡__ÿÿÛ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ`__ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_`__"__ÿÿÅ__ÿÿþ__ÿÿ__ÿÿI__ÿÿo_ÿÿ(r)__ÿÿâ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ7__ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_7__w__ÿÿº__ÿÿö__ÿÿ"__ÿÿg__ÿÿ¨__ÿÿÛ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ'__ÿÿg__ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?

Lð_<_g__§__ÿÿã__ÿÿ”__ÿÿ`__ÿÿ’__ÿÿÍ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ9__ÿÿg__ÿÿ
£__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_
£__ª__ÿÿè__ÿÿ)__ÿÿh_ÿÿ(c)__ÿÿä__ÿÿ(__ÿÿk__ÿÿ¨__ÿÿê__ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ê__ÿ__ÿÿ=__ÿÿ{_ÿÿ3/4__ÿÿù__ÿÿ9__ÿÿw__ÿÿ¶__ÿÿ÷__ÿÿ6__ÿÿ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_6__w__ÿÿ’_ÿÿ1/4__ÿÿç__ÿÿ(__ÿÿH__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿÁ__ÿÿþ__ÿÿ?-_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_?-_…-_ÿÿÇ-_ÿÿÍ-_ÿÿ_ÿÿ1_ÿÿm_ÿÿ°_ÿÿð_ÿÿ&
_ÿÿ3 _ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_3 _w _ÿÿ· _ÿÿ÷ _ÿÿ:!_ÿÿy!_ÿÿ¢!_ÿÿÌ!_ÿÿ÷!
_ÿÿ8″_ÿÿu”_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_u”_°”_ÿÿñ”_ÿÿÿ”_ÿÿ:#_ÿÿu#_ÿÿ?
#_ÿÿ#_ÿÿî#_ÿÿ,$_ÿÿo
$_ÿÿ_____<_o$_³$_ÿÿó
$_ÿÿ8%_ÿÿK%_ÿÿ%_ÿÿ1/2%_ÿÿø
%_ÿÿ<&_ÿÿx&_ÿÿ¸&_ÿÿ_____<
£(_ÿÿå(_ÿÿ_)_ÿÿ_____<_)_:)_ÿÿ
+_ÿÿA+_ÿÿ_____<_A
+_…+_ÿÿÅ+_ÿÿ,_ÿÿK,_ÿÿ?,_ÿÿÎ,_ÿÿß,_ÿÿ”-_ÿÿ3-_ÿÿ]-
_ÿÿ_____<_]-_-_ÿÿ-
_ÿÿî-_ÿÿ+._ÿÿj._ÿÿª._ÿÿí._ÿÿ-/_ÿÿn/_ÿÿ²/
_ÿÿ_____<_²/_ò/
_ÿÿ50_ÿÿu0_ÿÿ²0_ÿÿô0_ÿÿ61_ÿÿu1_ÿÿ
´1_ÿÿñ1_ÿÿ_2_ÿÿ_____<_2_:2_
3_ÿÿØ3_ÿÿ_4_ÿÿ_____<_4_
\4_ÿÿ?4_ÿÿÜ4_ÿÿ-5_ÿÿZ5_ÿÿ’5_ÿÿ?
5_ÿÿâ5_ÿÿ_6_ÿÿU6_ÿÿ_____<_U
7_ÿÿ_7_ÿÿE7_ÿÿl7_ÿÿ”7_ÿÿµ7_ÿÿà7_ÿÿ!
8_ÿÿ_____<_!
8_48_ÿÿ]8_ÿÿ?8_ÿÿá8_ÿÿû8_ÿÿ99_ÿÿt9_ÿÿ²9_ÿÿï9_ÿÿ
+:_ÿÿ_____<_
+:_S:_ÿÿm:_ÿÿ¦:_ÿÿÙ:_ÿÿ_;_ÿÿP;_ÿÿ;_ÿÿ·;_ÿÿñ;_ÿÿ(<_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿR?_ÿÿ’?_ÿÿÁ?_ÿÿÓ?_ÿÿ_@_ÿÿD@_ÿÿ?
@_ÿÿÀ@_ÿÿ_____<_À@__A_ÿÿ
$F_ÿÿaF_ÿÿ(tm)F_ÿÿÚF_ÿÿ_G_ÿÿMG_ÿÿ_____
Lð__?Lð_<_MG_?G_ÿÿÍG_ÿÿH_ÿÿJH_ÿÿSH_ÿÿ-
H_ÿÿÒH_ÿÿ_I_ÿÿ”I_ÿÿˆI_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_ˆI_?
I_ÿÿÚI_ÿÿ_J_ÿÿ:J_ÿÿ{J_ÿÿºJ_ÿÿÊJ_ÿÿK_ÿÿGK_ÿÿ…K_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_…
K_ÇK_ÿÿ_L_ÿÿHL_ÿÿL_ÿÿÇL_ÿÿåL_ÿÿæL_ÿÿñL_x_óL_x_õL_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?

Lð_____<_õL_÷L_ÿÿùL_ÿÿ=M_ÿÿ}
M_ÿÿÁM_ÿÿ_N_ÿÿ_N_ÿÿTN_ÿÿN_ÿÿÓN_ÿÿ_____
£P_ÿÿáP_ÿÿ”Q_ÿÿ_____<_”Q_c
¥Q_ÿÿäQ_ÿÿ”R_ÿÿcR_ÿÿ¥R_ÿÿçR_ÿÿ_S_ÿÿUS_ÿÿ-
S_ÿÿ_____<_-
S_ÂS_ÿÿ_T_ÿÿDT_ÿÿ}T_ÿÿ
°T_ÿÿÉT_ÿÿ_U_ÿÿU_ÿÿKU_ÿÿU_ÿÿ_____
V_ÿÿÃV_ÿÿóV_ÿÿ4W_ÿÿuW_ÿÿ¹W_ÿÿÍW_ÿÿ_____
X_ÿÿ}
X_ÿÿ1/4X_ÿÿ÷X_ÿÿ4Y_ÿÿtY_ÿÿ³Y_ÿÿòY_ÿÿ_Z_ÿÿ_____
Z_ÿÿ¿Z_ÿÿ_[_ÿÿD[_ÿÿ…[_ÿÿ[_ÿÿÌ[_ÿÿ_ÿÿN
_ÿÿ_____<_N__ÿÿÅ
_ÿÿ_]_ÿÿ]_ÿÿI]_ÿÿ]_ÿÿÈ]_ÿÿþ]_ÿÿ;^_ÿÿ|
^_ÿÿ_____<_|
^_µ^_ÿÿõ^_ÿÿ5__ÿÿv__ÿÿ¶__ÿÿä__ÿÿ&`_ÿÿf_ÿÿ
£`_ÿÿÞ`_ÿÿ_____<_Þ`_a_ÿÿZa_ÿ
a_ÿÿÙa_ÿÿ_b_ÿÿ”b_ÿÿcb_ÿÿ¤b_ÿÿåb_ÿÿ!
c_ÿÿ_____<_!c_bc_ÿÿ
¤c_ÿÿÃc_ÿÿþc_ÿÿ?d_ÿÿ_d_ÿÿ?
d_ÿÿØd_ÿÿ_e_ÿÿ]e_ÿÿ_____<_]e
e_ÿÿÚe_ÿÿ-
f_ÿÿˆf_ÿÿf_ÿÿ1/2f_ÿÿýf_ÿÿ;g_ÿÿg_ÿÿÁg_ÿÿ_____
h_ÿÿIh_ÿÿh_ÿÿËh_ÿÿ_i_ÿÿGi_ÿÿi_ÿÿÂi_ÿÿ_j_ÿÿ_____
j_ÿÿÊj_ÿÿ_k_ÿÿCk_ÿÿ”k_ÿÿÆk_ÿÿl_ÿÿ@l_ÿÿ_____
¥l_ÿÿêl_ÿÿ*m_ÿÿhm_ÿÿªm_ÿÿém_ÿÿïm_ÿÿ_n_ÿÿCn_ÿÿ_____
p_ÿÿÙp_ÿÿ_q_ÿÿMq_ÿÿ’q_ÿÿÐq_ÿÿr_ÿÿFr_ÿÿr_ÿÿÈr_ÿÿ_____
±u_ÿÿêu_ÿÿ”v_ÿÿcv_ÿÿ
v_ÿÿÁv_ÿÿ_w_ÿÿ>w_ÿÿ_____<
z_ÿÿÂz_ÿÿ_{_ÿÿA{_ÿÿ{_ÿÿ
¥{_ÿÿ_____<_¥{_
±{_ÿÿô{_ÿÿ7|_ÿÿs|_ÿÿ³|_ÿÿí|_ÿÿ2}_ÿÿq}_ÿÿ¯}_ÿÿî}
_ÿÿ_____<_î}_ö}
_ÿÿ4~_ÿÿt~_ÿÿ´~_ÿÿù~_ÿÿ:_ÿÿw_ÿÿ¹_ÿÿÙ_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿ_____<_?_\?
_ÿÿ(tm)?_ÿÿÛ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿa?_ÿÿq?_ÿÿ³?_ÿÿô?
_ÿÿ__ÿÿC_ÿÿ_____<_C___ÿÿÄ_ÿ
¤_ÿÿÁ_ÿÿ_”_ÿÿI”_ÿÿ?”_ÿÿ_____
¢”_ÿÿâ”_ÿÿ$…_ÿÿf…_ÿÿ¤…_ÿÿè…
_ÿÿ’_ÿÿ2_ÿÿr_ÿÿ_ÿÿ_____<_Õ
_ÿÿK?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÎ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿJ?_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿ_____<_?_Î?_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿP?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÑ?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿM?_ÿÿ’?_ÿÿÎ?_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿ_____<_?_,?_ÿÿg?
_ÿÿ(c)?_ÿÿè?

_ÿÿ*’_ÿÿk’_ÿÿª’_ÿÿ²’_ÿÿñ’_ÿÿ/’_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿ)-_ÿÿ_____<_)-_g-
_ÿÿ(c)-_ÿÿè-_ÿÿ(-_ÿÿ/-_ÿÿ]-_ÿÿ?-_ÿÿÛ-_ÿÿ__ÿÿ
_ÿÿ_____<_
___ÿÿÕ_ÿÿ÷_ÿÿ3(tm)_ÿÿE(tm)_ÿÿ”(tm)_ÿÿÃ(tm)_ÿÿñ(tm)_ÿÿ2_ÿÿq_ÿÿ_
_ÿÿc?_ÿÿ_____<_c?_??
_ÿÿà?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿV?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÛ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿP?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÐ?
_ÿÿ_____<_Ð?_?_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿT?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÂ?_ÿÿ_ _ÿÿ7 _ÿÿk _ÿÿ§ _ÿÿµ
_ÿÿ_____<_µ _ð _ÿÿ-
¡_ÿÿn¡_ÿÿ¬¡_ÿÿÎ¡_ÿÿ_¢_ÿÿ_¢_ÿÿ[¢_ÿÿn¢_ÿÿ?
¢_ÿÿ_____<_?¢_Ã
¢_ÿÿØ¢_ÿÿ÷¢_ÿÿ_£_ÿÿ$£_ÿÿM£_ÿÿ|£_ÿÿ’£_ÿÿÑ£_ÿÿè
£_ÿÿ_____<_è£_)¤_ÿÿi
¤_ÿÿª¤_ÿÿÄ¤_ÿÿü¤_ÿÿ:¥_ÿÿs¥_ÿÿ²¥_ÿÿñ¥_ÿÿ¦_ÿÿ_____?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
¦_E¦_ÿÿ?¦_ÿÿÀ¦_ÿÿ_§_ÿÿ?§_ÿÿ~§_ÿÿ?
§_ÿÿØ§_ÿÿ_¨_ÿÿV¨_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_V¨_-¨_ÿÿÕ¨_ÿÿ_(c)_ÿÿU(c)_ÿÿ?
(c)_ÿÿÑ(c)_ÿÿ_ª_ÿÿTª_ÿÿ-ª_ÿÿÕª_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Õª__”_ÿÿ”"_ÿÿ#”_ÿÿ.”_x_0″_x_2″_ÿÿ4″_ÿÿ6″_ÿÿ{”_ÿÿµ”_ÿÿ_?
Lð_____<_µ”_î”_ÿÿ,¬_ÿÿm¬_ÿÿ(r)¬_
_ÿÿÎ_ÿÿ(r)_ÿÿ_____<_
(r)_6(r)_ÿÿr(r)_ÿÿµ(r)_ÿÿó(r)_ÿÿ¯_ÿÿE¯_ÿÿ¯_ÿÿ¿¯_ÿÿÉ¯_ÿÿ_
°_ÿÿ_____<_°_C°_ÿÿ?
°_ÿÿÃ°_ÿÿÞ°_ÿÿ4±_ÿÿJ±_ÿÿ?±_ÿÿÇ
±_ÿÿ_²_ÿÿD²_ÿÿ_____<_D²_~²_
´_ÿÿB´_ÿÿ´_ÿÿ_____<_
´_Æ
´_ÿÿ_µ_ÿÿJµ_ÿÿhµ_ÿÿµ_ÿÿÉµ_ÿÿ¶_ÿÿK¶_ÿÿ¶_ÿÿÊ¶_ÿÿ_____
¸_ÿÿb¸_ÿÿ
¢¸_ÿÿä¸_ÿÿ¹_ÿÿM¹_ÿÿ_____<_M¹
£”_ÿÿæ”_ÿÿ%1/4_ÿÿb1/4_ÿÿ?
1/4_ÿÿÔ1/4_ÿÿ_1/2_ÿÿ&1/2_ÿÿe1/2_ÿÿ
¢1/2_ÿÿ_____<_
¢1/2_ã1/2_ÿÿ3/4_ÿÿ_3/4_ÿÿ?3/4_ÿÿË3/4_ÿÿ
¿_ÿÿH¿_ÿÿ¿_ÿÿÈ¿_ÿÿ_À_ÿÿ_____
Á_ÿÿ|
Á_ÿÿ1/4Á_ÿÿüÁ_ÿÿ<Â_ÿÿyÂ_ÿÿ_____
Ã_ÿÿ¹Ã_ÿÿíÃ_ÿÿ.Ä_ÿÿnÄ_ÿÿ?
Ä_ÿÿ_____?Lð_<_?
Ä_ÌÄ_ÿÿïÄ_ÿÿ2Å_ÿÿvÅ_ÿÿ
¤Å_ÿÿáÅ_ÿÿ_Æ_ÿÿ]Æ_ÿÿnÆ_ÿÿÆ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?

Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Æ_ÄÆ_ÿÿãÆ_ÿÿÇ_ÿÿbÇ_ÿÿnÇ_ÿÿ(r)Ç_ÿÿðÇ_ÿÿ.È_ÿÿpÈ_ÿÿ²È_ÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_²È_ïÈ_ÿÿ-É_ÿÿnÉ_ÿÿÉ_ÿÿ?
É_ÿÿÂÉ_ÿÿûÉ_ÿÿ:Ê_ÿÿxÊ_ÿÿ·Ê_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_·Ê_ýÊ_ÿÿ@Ë_ÿÿ?
Ë_ÿÿÃË_ÿÿ_Ì_ÿÿEÌ_ÿÿ”Ì_ÿÿÅÌ_ÿÿ_Í_ÿÿAÍ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_AÍ_~Í_ÿÿ?
Í_ÿÿÞÍ_ÿÿ”Î_ÿÿ.Î_ÿÿsÎ_ÿÿ¬Î_ÿÿéÎ_ÿÿ’Ï_ÿÿiÏ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_iÏ_rÏ_ÿÿ(r)Ï_ÿÿïÏ_ÿÿ2Ð_ÿÿ8Ð_ÿÿvÐ_ÿÿ3/4Ð_ÿÿúÐ_ÿÿ8Ñ_ÿÿxÑ_ÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_xÑ_¸Ñ_ÿÿøÑ_ÿÿ9Ò_ÿÿwÒ_ÿÿ²Ò_ÿÿóÒ_ÿÿ_Ó_ÿ
Ô_ÿÿÆÔ_ÿÿåÔ_ÿÿ#Õ_ÿÿaÕ_ÿÿ
Õ_ÿÿàÕ_ÿÿ_Ö_ÿÿ_____<_Ö_AÖ
×_ÿÿz×_ÿÿ¬×_ÿÿê×_ÿÿ*Ø_ÿÿnØ_ÿÿ_____
±Ø_ÿÿëØ_ÿÿ*Ù_ÿÿjÙ_ÿÿ(c)Ù_ÿÿêÙ_ÿÿ_Ú_ÿÿ[Ú_ÿÿÚ_ÿÿÛÚ_ÿÿ_____
Û_ÿÿÏÛ_ÿÿ
Ü_ÿÿJÜ_ÿÿÜ_ÿÿÍÜ_ÿÿÝ_ÿÿÝ_ÿÿ_____
Ý__Ý_x_Ý_ÿÿ_Ý_ÿÿWÝ_ÿÿÝ_ÿÿØÝ_ÿÿ_Þ_ÿÿUÞ_ÿÿiÞ_ÿÿÞ_ÿÿ_____
Þ_ÿÿàÞ_ÿÿ ß_ÿÿEß_ÿÿß_ÿÿ¦ß_ÿÿæß_ÿÿ
$à_ÿÿgà_ÿÿ¨à_ÿÿ_____<_¨à_æà_
%á_ÿÿhá_ÿÿ§á_ÿÿçá_ÿÿ+â_ÿÿnâ_ÿÿ|
â_ÿÿ1/2â_ÿÿùâ_ÿÿ_____<_ùâ_7ã
°ã_ÿÿÂã_ÿÿ_ä_ÿÿ@ä_ÿÿäã_ÿÿÃä_ÿÿÚä_ÿÿ_å_ÿÿ_____
+ç_ÿÿkç_ÿÿ_____<_kç_¬ç_ÿÿèç
è_ÿÿâè_ÿÿé_ÿÿEé_ÿÿ”é_ÿÿÊé_ÿÿ_____
ì_ÿÿ}ì_ÿÿ”ì_ÿÿãì_ÿÿ_í_ÿÿ?í_ÿÿ|
í_ÿÿ¹í_ÿÿüí_ÿÿ:î_ÿÿ_____<_:î_lî
˜ï_ÿÿ÷ï_ÿÿ4ð_ÿÿPð_ÿÿ?
ð_ÿÿ_____<_?
ð_Îð_ÿÿñ_ÿÿRñ_ÿÿwñ_ÿÿ·ñ_ÿÿìñ_ÿÿò_ÿÿAò_ÿÿ~ò_ÿÿ”ò_ÿÿ_____
ù_ÿÿÝù_ÿÿ_ú_ÿÿ_____<_ú_Mú_
ú_ÿÿÍú_ÿÿ_û_ÿÿPû_ÿÿû_ÿÿÉû_ÿÿ_ü_ÿÿCü_ÿÿ}
ü_ÿÿ_____<_}
ü_”ü_ÿÿÚü_ÿÿ_ý_ÿÿAý_ÿÿ?ý_ÿÿ1/2ý_ÿÿÿý_ÿÿ<þ_ÿÿ}
þ_ÿÿ1/2þ_ÿÿ_____<_1/2þ_ÿþ_ÿÿ
__ÿÿ_____<_}
__Á__ÿÿ___ÿÿ?__ÿÿ__ÿÿÃ__ÿÿ___ÿÿ?__ÿÿ}
__ÿÿÀ__ÿÿ___ÿÿ_____<_____ÿÿJ
_ÿÿO _ÿÿ? _ÿÿÓ _ÿÿè
_ÿÿ(_ÿÿj_ÿÿ¦_ÿÿ_____<_¦_é_ÿÿ
¤_ÿÿå_ÿÿ’_ÿÿR_ÿÿ’_ÿÿÏ_ÿÿ__ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿ?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿß_ÿÿ!

_ÿÿc_ÿÿ¦_ÿÿä_ÿÿ#__ÿÿ_____<_
%__ÿÿd__ÿÿ
¥__ÿÿç__ÿÿ)__ÿÿˆ__ÿÿ_____<_ˆ__
__ÿÿ×__ÿÿñ__ÿÿ/__ÿÿr__ÿÿ
´__ÿÿø__ÿÿ<__ÿÿ__ÿÿ¹__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿ|__ÿÿ”__ÿÿõ__ÿÿ6__ÿÿs__ÿÿ
°__ÿÿï__ÿÿ_____<_ï__
%__ÿÿe__ÿÿ£__ÿÿæ__ÿÿ%__ÿÿˆ__ÿÿ __ÿÿÛ__ÿÿ-
__ÿÿC__ÿÿ_____<_C__y__ÿÿ·__ÿÿ
__ÿÿ`__ÿÿ__ÿÿÂ__ÿÿþ__ÿÿ?__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿ_____<_?
____ÿÿç__ÿÿ#__ÿÿˆ__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿÝ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ¡__ÿÿÜ__ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿ-_ÿÿ1/4-_ÿÿý-_ÿÿ-
_ÿÿ_____<_-_`_ÿÿ
¤_ÿÿá_ÿÿ% _ÿÿ5 _ÿÿo _ÿÿ° _ÿÿí _ÿÿ)!_ÿÿg!
_ÿÿ_____<_g!_§!_ÿÿà!
_ÿÿ_”_ÿÿ8″_ÿÿx”_ÿÿ¶”_ÿÿó”_ÿÿ5#_ÿÿE#_ÿÿ?
#_ÿÿ_____<_?
#_À#_ÿÿü#_ÿÿ8$_ÿÿA$_ÿÿx$_ÿÿ´$_ÿÿö$_ÿÿ%_ÿÿI%_ÿÿ
%_ÿÿ_____<_%_Ë
%_ÿÿÕ%_ÿÿ_&_ÿÿT&_ÿÿ&_ÿÿ¯&_ÿÿ
°&_ÿÿ1/4&_x3/4&_ÿÿÀ&_ÿÿ_____?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_À&_Â&_ÿÿÄ&_ÿÿþ&_ÿÿ?’_ÿÿ”‘_ÿÿÁ’_ÿÿ_(_ÿÿA(_ÿÿ{(_ÿÿ¸(_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_¸(_ñ(_ÿÿ2)_ÿÿk)_ÿÿ)_ÿÿ¿)_ÿÿþ)_ÿÿ?
*_ÿÿ*_ÿÿÇ*_ÿÿÒ*_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Ò*_+_ÿÿI+_ÿÿ+_ÿÿÂ+_ÿÿÿ
+_ÿÿ@,_ÿÿ~,_ÿÿ,_ÿÿÉ,_ÿÿ-_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_-_A-_ÿÿ-_ÿÿÂ-_ÿÿþ-
_ÿÿ@._ÿÿ~._ÿÿ-._ÿÿØ._ÿÿ_/_ÿÿ?/_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_?/_y/_ÿÿµ/_ÿÿò/
_ÿÿ40_ÿÿt0_ÿÿ 0_ÿÿå0_ÿÿ_1_ÿÿ_1_ÿÿ\1_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
\1_w1_ÿÿ1_ÿÿà1_ÿÿþ1_ÿÿ=2_ÿÿ`2_ÿÿ?
2_ÿÿÚ2_ÿÿ_3_ÿÿW3_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_W3_3_ÿÿÔ3_ÿÿù3_ÿÿ94_ÿÿ?
4_ÿÿ¡4_ÿÿÝ4_ÿÿ_5_ÿÿ_5_ÿÿ¤5_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
¤5_Ã5_ÿÿÿ5_ÿÿ@6_ÿÿ{6_ÿÿ”6_ÿÿø6_ÿÿ27_ÿÿo7_ÿÿ(r)7_ÿÿï7_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ï7__8_ÿÿW8_ÿÿ8_ÿÿÜ8_ÿÿè8_ÿÿ+9_ÿÿn9_ÿÿ
°9_ÿÿñ9_ÿÿ/:_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?

Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_/:_r:_ÿÿ²:_ÿÿï:_ÿÿ.;_ÿÿm;_ÿÿ¬;_ÿÿâ;_ÿÿ_<_ÿÿU<_ÿÿs<_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_s<_?
<_ÿÿË<_ÿÿ=_ÿÿ<=_ÿÿ|=_ÿÿ3/4=_ÿÿ_>_ÿÿ>_ÿÿC>_ÿÿ}
>_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_}>_¿>_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿB?_ÿÿ…?_ÿÿÆ?_ÿÿü?
_ÿÿ:@_ÿÿ{@_ÿÿ¹@_ÿÿ÷@_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_÷@_2A_ÿÿlA_ÿÿ?
A_ÿÿÏA_ÿÿ_B_ÿÿMB_ÿÿ?B_ÿÿÑB_ÿÿêB_ÿÿC_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
C_OC_ÿÿ?C_ÿÿÒC_ÿÿ_D_ÿÿ6D_ÿÿrD_ÿÿ¬D_ÿÿîD_ÿÿ/
E_ÿÿLE_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_LE_E_ÿÿ·E_ÿÿóE_ÿÿ5F_ÿÿqF_ÿÿ
´F_ÿÿòF_ÿÿ2G_ÿÿpG_ÿÿ²G_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_²G_´G_ÿÿÏG_ÿÿêG_ÿÿ_H_ÿÿ
H_ÿÿ;H_ÿÿVH_ÿÿhH_ÿÿjH_ÿÿªH_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ªH_¸H_ÿÿ×H_ÿÿ_I_ÿÿHI_ÿÿ”I_ÿÿºI_ÿÿôI_ÿÿ(J_ÿÿaJ_ÿÿuJ_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_uJ_?
J_ÿÿÐJ_ÿÿ÷J_ÿÿ3K_ÿÿvK_ÿÿ¶K_ÿÿÜK_ÿÿ_L_ÿÿVL_ÿÿ’L_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_’L_ÏL_ÿÿM_ÿÿNM_ÿÿoM_ÿÿ¬M_ÿÿêM_ÿÿ’N_ÿÿDN_ÿÿN_ÿÿ
£N_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_£N_ÓN_ÿÿ_O_ÿÿLO_ÿÿUO_ÿÿO_ÿÿÛO_ÿÿ_P_ÿÿEP_ÿÿ
\P_ÿÿP_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_P_ÝP_ÿÿ_Q_ÿÿ!Q_ÿÿaQ_ÿÿ¦Q_ÿÿÏQ_ÿÿ_R_ÿÿSR_ÿÿ?
R_ÿÿ”R_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_”R_ûR_ÿÿ;S_ÿÿyS_ÿÿ¸S_ÿÿðS_ÿÿøS_ÿÿT_ÿÿ0T_ÿÿjT_ÿÿ(tm)T_ÿÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_(tm)T_ÇT_ÿÿ÷T_ÿÿ1U_ÿÿUU_ÿÿ”U_ÿÿÑU_ÿÿ_V_ÿÿSV_ÿÿ…
V_ÿÿ(c)V_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_(c)V_ÑV_ÿÿ_W_ÿÿQW_ÿÿjW_ÿÿ
£W_ÿÿ³W_ÿÿðW_ÿÿ1X_ÿÿXX_ÿÿX_ÿÿ_____
[_ÿÿ]
[_ÿÿd[_ÿÿ¦[_ÿÿÊ[_ÿÿ_____<_Ê[_
_ÿÿ._ÿÿg_ÿÿ¥_ÿÿè_ÿÿ
%]_ÿÿ=]_ÿÿx]_ÿÿ(r)]_ÿÿ_____<
__ÿÿÇ__ÿÿ `_ÿÿ_____<_
`_J`_ÿÿ?`_ÿÿº`_ÿÿè`_ÿÿ,a_ÿÿ@a_ÿÿxa_ÿÿa_ÿÿ?
a_ÿÿßa_ÿÿ_____<_ßa__b_ÿÿ;b_ÿ
c_ÿÿ_____<_?
c_¿c_ÿÿóc_ÿÿ7d_ÿÿwd_ÿÿ¹d_ÿÿùd_ÿÿe_ÿÿIe_ÿÿ?
e_ÿÿÍe_ÿÿ_____<_Íe_f_ÿÿOf_ÿÿ
%g_ÿÿeg_ÿÿ¦g_ÿÿæg_ÿÿ(h_ÿÿ_____

£j_ÿÿàj_ÿÿçj_ÿÿ&k_ÿÿik_ÿÿ¦k_ÿÿ
°k_ÿÿèk_ÿÿ”l_ÿÿ_____<_”l_?
l_ÿÿl_ÿÿ1/4l_ÿÿïl_ÿÿ1m_ÿÿFm_ÿÿdm_ÿÿm_ÿÿÇm_ÿÿßm_ÿÿ_____
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ßm__n_ÿÿGn_ÿÿn_ÿÿ¡n_ÿÿÛn_ÿÿün_ÿÿ1o_ÿÿˆo_ÿÿ?
o_ÿÿ§o_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_§o_âo_ÿÿ
p_ÿÿ1p_ÿÿop_ÿÿ¯p_ÿÿÔp_ÿÿq_ÿÿ_q_ÿÿUq_ÿÿ”q_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_”q_Öq_ÿÿ_r_ÿÿPr_ÿÿ?r_ÿÿÍr_ÿÿs_ÿÿ s_ÿÿ`s_ÿÿ?
s_ÿÿÏs_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Ïs__t_ÿÿDt_ÿÿt_ÿÿ1/2t_ÿÿÞt_ÿÿ@u_ÿÿdu_ÿÿu_ÿÿÊu_ÿÿv_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
v_Lv_ÿÿ?v_ÿÿÒv_ÿÿ_w_ÿÿWw_ÿÿ-
w_ÿÿÒw_ÿÿ_x_ÿÿNx_ÿÿx_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_x_Åx_ÿÿ_y_ÿÿ9y_ÿÿry_ÿÿ?
y_ÿÿÇy_ÿÿîy_ÿÿ0z_ÿÿpz_ÿÿwz_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð_____<_wz_µz_ÿÿåz_ÿÿ’{_ÿÿi{_ÿÿ”{_
_ÿÿS|_ÿÿ]|_ÿÿ|
_ÿÿ_____<_|_Ù|_ÿÿ_}
_ÿÿZ}_ÿÿ}_ÿÿÞ}_ÿÿ_~_ÿÿM~_ÿÿ?~_ÿÿË~_ÿÿ
_ÿÿ_____<_
____ÿÿS_ÿÿ”_ÿÿÓ_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿN?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÎ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ$?
_ÿÿ_____<_$?_f?_ÿÿ¦?
_ÿÿÆ?
_ÿÿ__ÿÿJ_ÿÿ_ÿÿÊ_ÿÿ_ÿÿ3_ÿÿo_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿw…_ÿÿ´…_ÿÿ_____<_
´…_æ…_ÿÿç…_ÿÿó…_xõ…_ÿÿ÷…
_ÿÿ7_ÿÿv_ÿÿ_ÿÿÔ_ÿÿ__ÿÿ_____
´_ÿÿó_ÿÿ0_ÿÿn_ÿÿ(r)_ÿÿÕ_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿO?_ÿÿZ?_ÿÿ…?_ÿÿ¿?_ÿÿý?_ÿÿ!?_ÿÿ]?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÒ?
_ÿÿ_____<_Ò?_ø?_ÿÿ7?
_ÿÿy?_ÿÿ¸?_ÿÿù?_ÿÿ.?_ÿÿm?_ÿÿ¤?_ÿÿè?_ÿÿò?
_ÿÿ_____<_ò?_2?_ÿÿs?
_ÿÿ-?_ÿÿØ?
_ÿÿ_’_ÿÿV’_ÿÿ’_ÿÿØ’_ÿÿ_’_ÿÿW’_ÿÿ_____
¤’_ÿÿà’_ÿÿ_”_ÿÿX”_ÿÿ’”_ÿÿÑ”_ÿÿÙ”_ÿÿ”_ÿÿF”_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿ_____<_-_G-_ÿÿ]-
_ÿÿg-_ÿÿ(c)-_ÿÿÅ-_ÿÿý-_ÿÿ-_ÿÿ2-_ÿÿk-_ÿÿs-
_ÿÿ_____<_s-_²-_ÿÿÌ-
_ÿÿë-_ÿÿ_ÿÿD_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÀ_ÿÿ_(tm)_ÿÿ:
(tm)_ÿÿD(tm)_ÿÿ_____<_D(tm)_?
(tm)_ÿÿ3/4(tm)_ÿÿ÷(tm)_ÿÿ0_ÿÿp_ÿÿ¬_ÿÿí_ÿÿ__ÿÿO_ÿÿ_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿO?_ÿÿ…?_ÿÿ¤?_ÿÿæ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ:?_ÿÿw?

_ÿÿ_____?Lð__?Lð_<_w?_”?
_ÿÿü?_ÿÿ;?_ÿÿj?_ÿÿ¨?_ÿÿÍ?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿN?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÐ?_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Ð?_ _ÿÿP
_ÿÿ? _ÿÿÏ _ÿÿ¡_ÿÿM¡_ÿÿ’¡_ÿÿÎ¡_ÿÿ_¢_ÿÿX¢_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_X¢_d¢_ÿÿ§¢_ÿÿÓ
¢_ÿÿ_£_ÿÿT£_ÿÿ£_ÿÿÇ£_ÿÿ_¤_ÿÿE¤_ÿÿ¤_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_¤_Ä¤_ÿÿ_¥_ÿÿ
¥_ÿÿI¥_ÿÿ?¥_ÿÿÉ¥_ÿÿ¦_ÿÿ?¦_ÿÿw¦_ÿÿ¸¦_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_¸¦_ó¦_ÿÿ_§_ÿÿ;§_ÿÿd§_ÿÿ §_ÿÿÄ§_ÿÿÞ§_ÿÿ?
¨_ÿÿ¨_ÿÿÃ¨_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?
Lð_<_Ã¨__(c)_ÿÿE(c)_ÿÿi(c)_ÿÿ¦(c)_ÿÿå(c)_ÿÿ’ª_ÿÿfª_ÿÿ¨ª_ÿÿêª_ÿÿ(”_ÿÿ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_(”_3″_ÿÿi”_ÿÿ
£”_ÿÿ¸”_ÿÿð”_ÿÿ¬_ÿÿH¬_ÿÿR¬_ÿÿ¬_ÿÿÃ¬_ÿÿ_____
(r)_ÿÿe(r)_ÿÿ
¢(r)_ÿÿà(r)_ÿÿ_____<_à(r)_¯_ÿÿ^
¯_ÿÿÌ¯_ÿÿ °_ÿÿF°_ÿÿ°_ÿÿË°_ÿÿ_±_ÿÿF
±_ÿÿ_____<_F±_
±_ÿÿÈ±_ÿÿ_²_ÿÿG²_ÿÿ²_ÿÿÃ²_ÿÿÿ²_ÿÿC³_ÿÿ|
³_ÿÿ3/4³_ÿÿ_____<_3/4³_è³_ÿÿ(
´_ÿÿ§´_ÿÿè´_ÿÿ&µ_ÿÿfµ_ÿÿ?µ_ÿÿËµ_ÿÿ
¶_ÿÿ_____<_
¶_J¶_ÿÿk¶_ÿÿ¶_ÿÿî¶_ÿÿ.·_ÿÿn·_ÿÿ?·_ÿÿÑ·_ÿÿ¸_ÿÿ
+¸_ÿÿ_____<_
+¸_V¸_ÿÿ…¸_ÿÿÄ¸_ÿÿ_¹_ÿÿC¹_ÿÿO¹_ÿÿ?
¹_ÿÿÑ¹_ÿÿè¹_ÿÿ(º_ÿÿ_____<_(º_
£º_ÿÿåº_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ0″_ÿÿg”_ÿÿª”_ÿÿî”_ÿÿ/1/4_ÿÿm1/4_ÿÿ_____
1/4_ÿÿÇ1/4_ÿÿâ1/4_ÿÿï1/4_ÿÿ01/2_ÿÿn1/2_ÿÿ¬1/2_ÿÿæ1/2_ÿÿ_3/4_ÿÿH3/
¿_ÿÿK¿_ÿÿd¿_ÿÿ¿_ÿÿÌ¿_ÿÿë¿_ÿÿ
+À_ÿÿ_____<_
+À_jÀ_ÿÿ(tm)À_ÿÿÜÀ_ÿÿëÀ_ÿÿ
+Á_ÿÿnÁ_ÿÿ¬Á_ÿÿëÁ_ÿÿ)Â_ÿÿeÂ_ÿÿ_____
Ã_ÿÿÏÃ_ÿÿÕÃ_ÿÿ_Ä_ÿÿTÄ_ÿÿ_____
Æ_ÿÿ_____<_}
Æ_ºÆ_ÿÿÞÆ_ÿÿ*Ç_ÿÿjÇ_ÿÿ¨Ç_ÿÿçÇ_ÿÿúÇ_ÿÿ4È_ÿÿtÈ_ÿÿ{È_ÿÿ_____
°Ê_ÿÿÂÊ_ÿÿÿÊ_ÿÿ9Ë_ÿÿxË_ÿÿ¸Ë_ÿÿøË_ÿÿ6Ì_ÿÿwÌ_ÿÿºÌ_ÿÿ_____
Í_ÿÿÊÍ_ÿÿÎ_ÿÿKÎ_ÿÿsÎ_ÿÿ
°Î_ÿÿêÎ_ÿÿ_____<_êÎ_&Ï_ÿÿdÏ_ÿ
£Ï_ÿÿäÏ_ÿÿ&Ð_ÿÿ7Ð_ÿÿwÐ_ÿÿ³Ð_ÿÿ÷Ð_ÿÿ7Ñ_ÿÿ_____
\Ñ_ÿÿ?
Ñ_ÿÿÐÑ_ÿÿ_Ò_ÿÿPÒ_ÿÿ’Ò_ÿÿÖÒ_ÿÿîÒ_ÿÿ*Ó_ÿÿ^Ó_ÿÿ_____
Ó_ÿÿãÓ_ÿÿ%Ô_ÿÿiÔ_ÿÿ?Ô_ÿÿÚÔ_ÿÿ_Õ_ÿÿTÕ_ÿÿmÕ_ÿÿ?

Õ_ÿÿ_____<_?
Õ_3/4Õ_ÿÿîÕ_ÿÿ(Ö_ÿÿ3Ö_ÿÿWÖ_ÿÿÖ_ÿÿ1/2Ö_ÿÿøÖ_ÿÿ:×_ÿÿs×_ÿÿ_
¥Ù_ÿÿÖÙ_ÿÿ_Ú_ÿÿSÚ_ÿÿwÚ_ÿÿ”Ú_ÿÿ÷Ú_ÿÿ4Û_ÿÿrÛ_ÿÿÛ_ÿÿ_____
Ü_ÿÿÝÜ_ÿÿ_Ý_ÿÿ=Ý_ÿÿoÝ_ÿÿ
±Ý_ÿÿôÝ_ÿÿ_____<_ôÝ_1Þ_ÿÿ
à_ÿÿ(r)à_ÿÿìà_ÿÿ_á_ÿÿ4á_ÿÿtá_ÿÿ³á_ÿÿòá_ÿÿ/
â_ÿÿ_____<_/
â_pâ_ÿÿâ_ÿÿéâ_ÿÿ(ã_ÿÿfã_ÿÿ¨ã_ÿÿèã_ÿÿ)ä_ÿÿXä_ÿÿä_ÿÿ_____
¤å_ÿÿãå_ÿÿ#æ_ÿÿCæ_ÿÿ”æ_ÿÿÂæ_ÿÿ_____
ç_ÿÿÐç_ÿÿè_ÿÿFè_ÿÿ[è_ÿÿ(tm)è_ÿÿ
£è_ÿÿ_____<_
£è_àè_ÿÿúè_ÿÿ
%é_ÿÿdé_ÿÿ§é_ÿÿìé_ÿÿ*ê_ÿÿkê_ÿÿê_ÿÿìê_ÿÿ_____
ë_ÿÿßë_ÿÿ!ì_ÿÿ`ì_ÿÿì_ÿÿÑì_ÿÿãì_ÿÿ
í_ÿÿ_____<_ í_^í_ÿÿ}
í_ÿÿ¹í_ÿÿðí_ÿÿ.î_ÿÿnî_ÿÿ²î_ÿÿëî_ÿÿ)ï_ÿÿfï_ÿÿ_____
¢ï_ÿÿáï_ÿÿ$ð_ÿÿhð_ÿÿªð_ÿÿÒð_ÿÿñ_ÿÿHñ_ÿÿ?
ñ_ÿÿÌñ_ÿÿ_____<_Ìñ_ò_ÿÿJò_ÿ
ò_ÿÿ³ò_ÿÿôò_ÿÿ1ó_ÿÿpó_ÿÿ¯ó_ÿÿêó_ÿÿ
$ô_ÿÿ_____<_
$ô_bô_ÿÿ¡ô_ÿÿãô_ÿÿ”õ_ÿÿ?
õ_ÿÿõ_ÿÿÂõ_ÿÿ_ö_ÿÿ&ö_ÿÿgö_ÿÿ_____
¤ö_ÿÿÈö_ÿÿ_÷_ÿÿC÷_ÿÿ}
÷_ÿÿ1/4÷_ÿÿï÷_ÿÿ1ø_ÿÿhø_ÿÿ¦ø_ÿÿ_____
$ù_ÿÿcù_ÿÿù_ÿÿÚù_ÿÿ_ú_ÿÿZú_ÿÿ(tm)ú_ÿÿÚú_ÿÿ_û_ÿÿ_____
û_ÿÿÒû_ÿÿ_ü_ÿÿRü_ÿÿ’ü_ÿÿÏü_ÿÿý_ÿÿJý_ÿÿý_ÿÿ_____
ÿ_ÿÿËÿ_ÿÿ_____<_Ëÿ____ÿÿ__ÿ
°__ÿÿÛ__ÿÿ_____<_Û____ÿÿ9__ÿ
´__ÿÿó__ÿÿ1__ÿÿo__ÿÿ__ÿÿ¶__ÿÿÈ__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿ_____<_
__3__ÿÿs__ÿÿ³__ÿÿó__ÿÿ._ÿÿs_ÿÿ”_ÿÿç_ÿÿ&__ÿÿf__ÿÿ_____
% _ÿÿc _ÿÿ¥ _ÿÿå _ÿÿ
_ÿÿ;_ÿÿ^_ÿÿ-
_ÿÿ_____<_-
_¿_ÿÿ__ÿÿ@_ÿÿ_ÿÿ_ÿÿÆ_ÿÿ
_ÿÿ__ÿÿJ_ÿÿ`_ÿÿ_____<_`_p
_ÿÿD_ÿÿy_ÿÿ_____<_y_¹_ÿÿÕ_
__K__ÿÿg__ÿÿ¢__ÿÿà__ÿÿ__ÿÿ#__ÿÿN__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿË__ÿÿÝ__ÿÿ_____<_Ý__-
__ÿÿf__ÿÿ?__ÿÿ”__ÿÿß__ÿÿ__ÿÿ-
__ÿÿL__ÿÿ^__ÿÿ__ÿÿ_____<_____’__
__ÿÿÍ__ÿÿ__ÿÿN__ÿÿ__ÿÿ(tm)__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿd__ÿÿ__ÿÿÔ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ!__ÿÿZ__ÿÿ-
__ÿÿÓ__ÿÿÞ__ÿÿ_____<_Þ__ù__ÿ

_ÿÿˆ-_ÿÿ?-_ÿÿâ-
_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ_____<_”_6_ÿÿw_ÿÿ³_ÿ
_ÿÿd _ÿÿ¡ _ÿÿ(r) _ÿÿì _ÿÿ,!
_ÿÿ_____<_,!_q!_ÿÿ!
_ÿÿÔ!
_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ_”_ÿÿ(”_ÿÿd”_ÿÿ”_ÿÿÈ”_ÿÿ_#_ÿÿ_____
$_ÿÿc$_ÿÿ¡$_ÿÿÊ$_ÿÿ%_ÿÿK
%_ÿÿ_____<_K%_?
%_ÿÿÉ
%_ÿÿ_&_ÿÿM&_ÿÿ’&_ÿÿÀ&_ÿÿ_’_ÿÿ@’_ÿÿz’_ÿÿ²’_ÿÿ_____
$(_ÿÿ8(_ÿÿt(_ÿÿ¯(_ÿÿì(_ÿÿ/)_ÿÿr)_ÿÿ”)_ÿÿí)_ÿÿ_____
*_ÿÿa*_ÿÿ?*_ÿÿÝ*_ÿÿí*_ÿÿ0+_ÿÿp+_ÿÿ˚+_ÿÿð
+_ÿÿ_,_ÿÿ_____<_,_/,_ÿÿs,_ÿÿ
´,_ÿÿö,_ÿÿ5-_ÿÿw-_ÿÿ·-_ÿÿø-
_ÿÿ..._ÿÿh._ÿÿ_____<_h._§._ÿÿÑ
_ÿÿ9/_ÿÿw/_ÿÿ?/_ÿÿá/
_ÿÿ0_ÿÿH0_ÿÿt0_ÿÿ_____<_t0_
1_ÿÿÑ1_ÿÿÝ1_ÿÿ_2_ÿÿZ2_ÿÿ_____
2_ÿÿ¯2_ÿÿç2_ÿÿ 3_ÿÿ`3_ÿÿ?3_ÿÿã3_ÿÿ
%4_ÿÿf4_ÿÿ¦4_ÿÿ_____<_¦4_Þ4_
5_ÿÿ_____<_?
5_Ý5_ÿÿ-6_ÿÿ]6_ÿÿ6_ÿÿ×6_ÿÿ_7_ÿÿ
+7_ÿÿk7_ÿÿ7_ÿÿô7_ÿÿ_____<_
8_ÿÿ-8_ÿÿ[8_ÿÿ?
8_ÿÿÚ8_ÿÿ_9_ÿÿS9_ÿÿ9_ÿÿÇ9_ÿÿ_:_ÿÿ_____
<_ÿÿ”<_ÿÿú<_ÿÿ:=_ÿÿU=_ÿÿ’=_ÿÿÏ=_ÿÿ>_ÿÿO>_ÿÿ>_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿa?_ÿÿ ?_ÿÿá?_ÿÿ
@_ÿÿˆ@_ÿÿr@_ÿÿ@_ÿÿ_____<_
A_ÿÿØA_ÿÿ_B_ÿÿ3B_ÿÿoB_ÿÿ¯B_ÿÿßB_ÿÿ_____
C_ÿÿÔC_ÿÿ_D_ÿÿWD_ÿÿ?
D_ÿÿD_ÿÿÍD_ÿÿ_E_ÿÿ_____<_E_
E_ÿÿÂE_ÿÿ_F_ÿÿGF_ÿÿOF_ÿÿ’F_ÿÿÐF_ÿÿG_ÿÿPG_ÿÿ_____
J_ÿÿÎJ_ÿÿK_ÿÿ K_ÿÿ]K_ÿÿ?
K_ÿÿáK_ÿÿ_____<_áK_
L_ÿÿTL_ÿÿ”L_ÿÿÐL_ÿÿ_M_ÿÿVM_ÿÿlM_ÿÿªM_ÿÿçM_ÿÿ*N_ÿÿ_____
N_ÿÿÞN_ÿÿ
O_ÿÿ_O_ÿÿ`O_ÿÿlO_x_nO_ÿÿpO_ÿÿrO_ÿÿ_____
P_ÿÿnP_ÿÿ”P_ÿÿïP_ÿÿ)Q_ÿÿfQ_ÿÿ_____
±R_ÿÿ¿R_ÿÿ_S_ÿÿ.S_ÿÿ_____<_
£W_ÿÿàW_ÿÿêW_ÿÿ/X_ÿÿ>X_ÿÿ}
X_ÿÿÂX_ÿÿ_Y_ÿÿ_Y_ÿÿFY_ÿÿ_____
¤Y_ÿÿáY_ÿÿ_Z_ÿÿTZ_ÿÿyZ_ÿÿ”Z_ÿÿÖZ_ÿÿ_[_ÿÿ&[_ÿÿ_____
[_ÿÿ”[_ÿÿß[_ÿÿ_ÿÿM_ÿÿk_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ¸
_ÿÿ_____<_¸_Í_ÿÿü

_ÿÿ<]_ÿÿV]_ÿÿ]_ÿÿ×]_ÿÿ_^_ÿÿ^_ÿÿg^_ÿÿ
£^_ÿÿ_____<_£^_â^_ÿÿ
$__ÿÿe__ÿÿ¤__ÿÿâ__ÿÿ!`_ÿÿ“_ÿÿ¤`_ÿÿç`_ÿÿ
%a_ÿÿ_____<_
%a_Xa_ÿÿea_ÿÿa_ÿÿÈa_ÿÿùa_ÿÿ5b_ÿÿkb_ÿÿ¦b_ÿÿäb_ÿÿ_c_ÿÿ_____
´d_ÿÿÎd_ÿÿ_____<_Îd_ìd_ÿÿÞd_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Åf_æf_ÿÿ_g_ÿÿRg_ÿÿ”g_ÿÿ¸g_ÿÿég_ÿÿÿg_ÿÿ_h_ÿÿPh_ÿÿh_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_h_Æh_ÿÿ_i_ÿÿFi_ÿÿi_ÿÿÈi_ÿÿài_ÿÿ_j_ÿÿ_j_ÿÿ)j_ÿÿdj_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_dj_tj_ÿÿ³j_ÿÿðj_ÿÿ_k_ÿÿ_k_ÿÿ=k_ÿÿzk_ÿÿ¹k_ÿÿôk_ÿÿ2l_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_2l_ql_ÿÿ²l_ÿÿñl_ÿÿ_m_ÿÿ)m_ÿÿgm_ÿÿ(c)m_ÿÿém_ÿÿ#n_ÿÿbn_ÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_bn_kn_ÿÿvn_ÿÿ·n_ÿÿún_ÿÿ=o_ÿÿ?
o_ÿÿ1/2o_ÿÿ_p_ÿÿ@p_ÿÿp_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_p_Áp_ÿÿýp_ÿÿ_q_ÿÿ]q_ÿÿ?
q_ÿÿáq_ÿÿ”r_ÿÿ_r_ÿÿ?r_ÿÿÝr_ÿÿ_?
Lð_____<_Ýr__s_ÿÿHs_ÿÿIs_ÿÿUs_x_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_as_cs_ÿÿes_ÿÿ¡s_ÿÿÝs_ÿÿ_t_ÿÿ\t_ÿÿ-t_ÿÿÛt_ÿÿ_u_ÿÿ-
u_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_-u_Wu_ÿÿ”u_ÿÿ×u_ÿÿ_v_ÿÿ]v_ÿÿ?
v_ÿÿÝv_ÿÿ_w_ÿÿ]w_ÿÿw_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_w_Öw_ÿÿx_ÿÿMx_ÿÿ”x_ÿÿ¡x_ÿÿßx_ÿÿ!
y_ÿÿ@y_ÿÿ~y_ÿÿ¿y_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_¿y__z_ÿÿGz_ÿÿz_ÿÿÉz_ÿÿÐz_ÿÿ{_ÿÿJ{_ÿÿ{_ÿÿÆ{_ÿÿ_|
_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_|_H|_ÿÿ|_ÿÿÉ|_ÿÿ}_ÿÿI}_ÿÿ}_ÿÿ¥}_ÿÿÅ}
_ÿÿ_~_ÿÿ9~_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð_<_9~_Q~_ÿÿ?
~_ÿÿ(tm)~_ÿÿØ~_ÿÿä~_ÿÿ__ÿÿO_ÿÿ?_ÿÿ’_ÿÿÕ_ÿÿ_____?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Õ_ß_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿF?_ÿÿ\?_ÿÿ(tm)?_ÿÿÆ?_ÿÿõ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿF?_ÿÿP?_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_P?_p?_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿÈ?_ÿÿß?_ÿÿ_ÿÿJ_ÿÿ?_ÿÿ _ÿÿã_ÿÿ’_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_’_i_ÿÿª_ÿÿé_ÿÿ’”_ÿÿf”_ÿÿr”_ÿÿ±”_ÿÿõ”_ÿÿ5…_ÿÿv…
_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_v…_,…_ÿÿù…_ÿÿ8_ÿÿu_ÿÿ±_ÿÿí_ÿÿ+_ÿÿh_ÿÿ
¢_ÿÿÞ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?

Lð_ < _Þ____ÿÿZ_ÿÿx_ÿÿº_ÿÿè_ÿÿ&_ÿÿ5_ÿÿy_ÿÿ·_ÿÿú_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____< _ú_6_ÿÿu_ÿÿµ_ÿÿ3/4_ÿÿ ÷ _ÿÿ4_ÿÿm_ÿÿ_ÿÿÇ_ÿÿÞ_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿß?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿˆ?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÃ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ@?
_ÿÿ_____< _@?_M?_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿÂ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿS?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿ3/4?_ÿÿ ÷ ?_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿ_____< _?_a?_ÿÿ??
_ÿÿÖ?_ÿÿæ?
_ÿÿ&'_ÿÿh'_ÿÿ§'_ÿÿà'_ÿÿì'_ÿÿ_'_ÿÿ_____
\"_ÿÿ""_ÿÿÊ"_ÿÿ _ÿÿB_ÿÿi_ÿÿª_ÿÿë_ÿÿ,-
_ÿÿ_____< _,-_l-_ÿÿ(r)-
_ÿÿó-_ÿÿ2-_ÿÿq-_ÿÿ³-_ÿÿñ-
_ÿÿ_ÿÿ"_ÿÿG_ÿÿ_____< _G____ÿÿ
_ÿÿ~?_ÿÿº?_ÿÿá?_ÿÿî?_ÿÿ*?_ÿÿP?_ÿÿg?_ÿÿ¦?_ÿÿÙ?
_ÿÿ_____< _Ù?__?_ÿÿB?
_ÿÿ?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿ²?_ÿÿî?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿU?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÑ?
_ÿÿ_____< _Ñ?_Ø?_ÿÿ
_ÿÿ1 _ÿÿh _ÿÿ¯ _ÿÿÆ _ÿÿ_¡_ÿÿ-
¡_ÿÿD¡_ÿÿR¡_ÿÿ_____< _R¡_
\¡_ÿÿ?¡_ÿÿÃ¡_ÿÿ_¢_ÿÿ?¢_ÿÿt¢_ÿÿµ¢_ÿÿï¢_ÿÿ,£_ÿÿ=
£_ÿÿ_____< _=£_~
£_ÿÿ¿£_ÿÿü£_ÿÿ;¤_ÿÿ|¤_ÿÿ1/2¤_ÿÿÆ¤_ÿÿ_¥_ÿÿ;¥_ÿÿ|
¥_ÿÿ_____< _|
¥_1/2¥_ÿÿú
¥_ÿÿ4¦_ÿÿo¦_ÿÿ³¦_ÿÿò¦_ÿÿ.§_ÿÿg§_ÿÿ(c)§_ÿÿÅ§_ÿÿ_____
ª_ÿÿ³ª_ÿÿõª_ÿÿ
+"_ÿÿc"_ÿÿ_____< _c"_?"_ÿÿ(c)'
¬_ÿÿ_¬_ÿÿ¬_ÿÿÜ¬_ÿÿ#_ÿÿL_ÿÿ_ÿÿ_____?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_ < __Ì_ÿÿ_(r)_ÿÿJ(r)_ÿÿ(r)_ÿÿÊ(r)_ÿÿÔ(r)_ÿÿ¯_ÿÿI¯_ÿÿ¯_ÿÿÄ¯_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_ < _Ä¯_Õ¯_ÿÿ_°_ÿÿ>°_ÿÿw°_ÿÿ´°_ÿÿõ°_ÿÿ_±_ÿÿK±_ÿÿL
±_ÿÿX±_x__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____< _X±_Z±_ÿÿ\±_ÿÿˆ±_ÿÿ`±_ÿÿ¡±_ÿÿã
±_ÿÿ
$²_ÿÿb²_ÿÿp²_ÿÿ¬²_ÿÿ_____< _¬
$³_ÿÿb³_ÿÿ¤³_ÿÿ1/2³_ÿÿû³_ÿÿ:´_ÿÿ{´_ÿÿ"´_ÿÿÐ
´_ÿÿ_____< _Ð
´__µ_ÿÿUµ_ÿÿ?
µ_ÿÿÏµ_ÿÿ¶_ÿÿ2¶_ÿÿo¶_ÿÿ³¶_ÿÿó¶_ÿÿ2·_ÿÿ_____
·_ÿÿÑ·_ÿÿ¸_ÿÿO¸_ÿÿ?
¸_ÿÿË¸_ÿÿ¹_ÿÿH¹_ÿÿR¹_ÿÿ_____
±º_ÿÿïº_ÿÿ»_ÿÿM"_ÿÿ?"_ÿÿ_____
Lð__?Lð__?

Lð_<_Ô1/2_3/4_ÿÿP3/4_ÿÿ'3/4_ÿÿÒ3/4_ÿÿ_¿_ÿÿT¿_ÿÿ¿_ÿÿÜ¿_ÿÿê¿_ÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_À_cÀ_ÿÿ À_ÿÿàÀ_ÿÿ%Á_ÿÿ^Á_ÿÿ Á_ÿÿ ßÁ_ÿÿ!
Â_ÿÿ[Â_ÿÿ?Â_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_?Â_ÝÂ_ÿÿ_Ã_ÿÿXÃ_ÿÿ'Ã_ÿÿ
´Ã_ÿÿôÃ_ÿÿ4Ä_ÿÿvÄ_ÿÿ¶Ä_ÿÿôÄ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_ôÄ_6Å_ÿÿyÅ_ÿÿ
±Å_ÿÿëÅ_ÿÿ+Æ_ÿÿlÆ_ÿÿÆ_ÿÿÌÆ_ÿÿ_Ç_ÿÿDÇ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_DÇ_Ç_ÿÿÄÇ_ÿÿöÇ_ÿÿ3È_ÿÿtÈ_ÿÿ±È_ÿÿðÈ_ÿÿ/
É_ÿÿnÉ_ÿÿ(r)É_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_(r)É_ïÉ_ÿÿ/Ê_ÿÿlÊ_ÿÿ(tm)Ê_ÿÿ
¢Ê_ÿÿáÊ_ÿÿ_Ë_ÿÿWË_ÿÿhË_ÿÿyË_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð_____<_yË_?
Ë_ÿÿ¡Ë_ÿÿÏË_ÿÿàË_ÿÿÌ_ÿÿfÌ_ÿÿ§Ì_ÿÿëÌ_ÿÿ,Í_ÿÿnÍ_ÿÿ_____
Ï_ÿÿ_____<_?
Ï_ßÏ_ÿÿ"Ð_ÿÿdÐ_ÿÿ
¥Ð_ÿÿãÐ_ÿÿÑ_ÿÿJÑ_ÿÿÑ_ÿÿÀÑ_ÿÿ_Ò_ÿÿ_____
×_ÿÿK×_ÿÿ?×_ÿÿÊ×_ÿÿã×_ÿÿ!
Ø_ÿÿ_____<_!
Ø_NØ_ÿÿØ_ÿÿËØ_ÿÿÖØ_ÿÿ×Ø_ÿÿãØ_x_åØ_ÿÿçØ_ÿÿéØ_ÿÿëØ_ÿÿ___
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ëØ_íØ_ÿÿ.Ù_ÿÿ8Ù_ÿÿwÙ_ÿÿ·Ù_ÿÿßÙ_ÿÿ
Ú_ÿÿ(Ú_ÿÿkÚ_ÿÿªÚ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ªÚ_ÆÚ_ÿÿ_Û_ÿÿCÛ_ÿÿ"Û_ÿÿÄÛ_ÿÿÕÛ_ÿÿ_Ü_ÿÿ?Ü_ÿÿ?
Ü_ÿÿÁÜ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?
Lð_<_ÁÜ_ËÜ_ÿÿ_Ý_ÿÿDÝ_ÿÿ"Ý_ÿÿÁÝ_ÿÿöÝ_ÿÿ_Þ_ÿÿ<Þ_ÿÿ{Þ_ÿÿºÞ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ºÞ_ÕÞ_ÿÿâÞ_ÿÿ_ß_ÿÿBß_ÿÿß_ÿÿºß_ÿÿìß_ÿÿ_à_ÿÿDà_ÿÿ"à_ÿÿ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_"à_Ãà_ÿÿöà_ÿÿ_á_ÿÿBá_ÿÿMá_ÿÿá_ÿÿÎá_ÿÿ_â_ÿÿQâ_ÿÿ"â_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_"â_Óâ_ÿÿ_ã_ÿÿ;ã_ÿÿXã_ÿÿ"ã_ÿÿÓã_ÿÿ_ä_ÿÿNä_ÿÿ?
ä_ÿÿÐä_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_Ðä_öä_ÿÿ/
å_ÿÿlå_ÿÿå_ÿÿëå_ÿÿ
+æ_ÿÿmæ_ÿÿ¯æ_ÿÿÞæ_ÿÿ_ç_ÿÿ_____
ç_ÿÿ?ç_ÿÿØç_ÿÿ_è_ÿÿWè_ÿÿ?è_ÿÿÇè_ÿÿ
é_ÿÿIé_ÿÿ_____<_Ié_é_ÿÿÊé_ÿÿ
ê_ÿÿLê_ÿÿiê_ÿÿ§ê_ÿÿäê_ÿÿë_ÿÿ\ë_ÿÿ-
ë_ÿÿ_____<_-
ë_Øë_ÿÿ_ì_ÿÿQì_ÿÿ?ì_ÿÿÓì_ÿÿ í_ÿÿ/

Lð_____<_l”_¨”_ÿÿé”_ÿÿ+#_ÿÿn#_ÿÿ
°#_ÿÿì#_ÿÿ,$_ÿÿl$_ÿÿ¬$_ÿÿï
$_ÿÿ_____<_ï$_0%_ÿÿq
%_ÿÿ¥%_ÿÿä
%_ÿÿ#&_ÿÿg&_ÿÿ&_ÿÿ¹&_ÿÿù&_ÿÿ7′_ÿÿ_____
(_ÿÿ<(_ÿÿ_____<_<(_>(_ÿÿ@
(_ÿÿ1/2(_ÿÿù(_ÿÿ.)_ÿÿk)_ÿÿ(c))_ÿÿè)_ÿÿ_*_ÿÿ_____
*_ÿÿÄ*_ÿÿ_+_ÿÿJ+_ÿÿ+_ÿÿº+_ÿÿù
+_ÿÿ8,_ÿÿ{,_ÿÿ_____<_{,_1/4,_
_ÿÿn-_ÿÿ?-_ÿÿÚ-
_ÿÿ_._ÿÿQ._ÿÿ”._ÿÿÔ._ÿÿ_____<
_ÿÿR/_ÿÿ?/_ÿÿÇ/_ÿÿÜ/
_ÿÿ_0_ÿÿY0_ÿÿ(tm)0_ÿÿÚ0_ÿÿ_1_ÿÿ_____
\4_ÿÿ4_ÿÿÜ4_ÿÿ_5_ÿÿV5_ÿÿ5_ÿÿÁ5_ÿÿ_____
6_ÿÿ”6_ÿÿÃ6_ÿÿÝ6_ÿÿ_7_ÿÿY7_ÿÿ?
7_ÿÿÙ7_ÿÿ_8_ÿÿ_____<_8_]8_
8_ÿÿà8_ÿÿ
9_ÿÿB9_ÿÿ9_ÿÿ¿9_ÿÿÿ9_ÿÿC:_ÿÿ:_ÿÿ_____
<_ÿÿÐ<_ÿÿ_____<_Ð<__=_ÿÿ
_ÿÿC?_ÿÿ_____<_C?_?
_ÿÿ¿?_ÿÿü?_ÿÿ8@_ÿÿp@_ÿÿ¬@_ÿÿí@_ÿÿ.A_ÿÿqA_ÿÿ
±A_ÿÿ_____<_
±A_÷A_ÿÿ3B_ÿÿYB_ÿÿ’B_ÿÿÅB_ÿÿÆB_ÿÿÒB_x_ÔB_ÿÿÖB_ÿÿØB_ÿÿ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_ØB__C_ÿÿTC_ÿÿ}
C_ÿÿ”C_ÿÿøC_ÿÿ.D_ÿÿlD_ÿÿ(c)D_ÿÿåD_ÿÿ_E_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_E_TE_ÿÿ”E_ÿÿÈE_ÿÿ_F_ÿÿBF_ÿÿzF_ÿÿ·F_ÿÿùF_ÿÿ_G_ÿÿCG_ÿÿ_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_CG_dG_ÿÿ¡G_ÿÿäG_ÿÿ_H_ÿÿTH_ÿÿ’H_ÿÿÑH_ÿÿ_I_ÿÿ-
I_ÿÿYI_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_YI_-
I_ÿÿÑI_ÿÿ_J_ÿÿKJ_ÿÿJ_ÿÿÇJ_ÿÿ_K_ÿÿ0K_ÿÿjK_ÿÿ¨K_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_¨K_éK_ÿÿ)L_ÿÿhL_ÿÿ§L_ÿÿåL_ÿÿ
M_ÿÿ[M_ÿÿ(tm)M_ÿÿÒM_ÿÿN_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
N_’N_ÿÿfN_ÿÿ£N_ÿÿàN_ÿÿ-O_ÿÿ_O_ÿÿ£O_ÿÿâO_ÿÿ
P_ÿÿdP_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_dP_’P_ÿÿÌP_ÿÿQ_ÿÿNQ_ÿÿQ_ÿÿÇQ_ÿÿÿQ_
S_ÿÿÄS_ÿÿ_T_ÿÿGT_ÿÿT_ÿÿµT_ÿÿ÷T_ÿÿ_U_ÿÿ_____
´W_ÿÿÎW_ÿÿX_ÿÿ5X_ÿÿrX_ÿÿ°X_ÿÿðX_ÿÿ
+Y_ÿÿhY_ÿÿ(c)Y_ÿÿ_____<_(c)Y
Z_ÿÿIZ_ÿÿ_____<_IZ_Z_ÿÿÍZ_ÿÿ
_ÿÿ’_ÿÿ_____<_’_Ì

_ÿÿ]_ÿÿ
]_ÿÿZ]_ÿÿ]_ÿÿØ]_ÿÿ_^_ÿÿV^_ÿÿ^_ÿÿÈ^_ÿÿ_____
£__ÿÿâ__ÿÿ_`_ÿÿ>`_ÿÿÿ`_ÿÿ"`_ÿÿ_____
$a_ÿÿFa_ÿÿ…a_ÿÿ¬a_ÿÿêa_ÿÿ_b_ÿÿ_b_ÿÿZb_ÿÿ-
b_ÿÿ_____<_-
b_¬b_ÿÿðb_ÿÿ÷b_ÿÿ9c_ÿÿvc_ÿÿ·c_ÿÿÖc_ÿÿ_d_ÿÿ:d_ÿÿ_d_ÿÿ_____
d_ÿÿ¦d_ÿÿÁd_ÿÿ_e_ÿÿ&e_ÿÿde_ÿÿe_ÿÿ
´e_ÿÿóe_ÿÿ3f_ÿÿ_____?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð_<_3f_tf_ÿÿ£f_ÿÿßf_ÿÿg_ÿÿ?
g_ÿÿg_ÿÿÀg_ÿÿÓg_ÿÿ_h_ÿÿFh_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Fh_h_ÿÿ
¢h_ÿÿ1/2h_ÿÿüh_ÿÿ?i_ÿÿ|i_ÿÿµi_ÿÿîi_ÿÿ.j_ÿÿnj_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_nj_-
j_ÿÿÕj_ÿÿêj_ÿÿ_k_ÿÿVk_ÿÿ?k_ÿÿ?k_ÿÿ(tm)k_x_k_ÿÿ?k_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_____?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_?k_?
k_ÿÿ¡k_ÿÿ£k_ÿÿ¥k_ÿÿçk_ÿÿ&l_ÿÿel_ÿÿ¥l_ÿÿ¸l_ÿÿûl_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ûl_@m_ÿÿm_ÿÿÂm_ÿÿ_n_ÿÿFn_ÿÿn_ÿÿÌn_ÿÿ_o_ÿÿ!
o_ÿÿKo_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Ko_o_ÿÿËo_ÿÿp_ÿÿMp_ÿÿop_ÿÿ¬p_ÿÿëp_ÿÿ
$q_ÿÿFq_ÿÿq_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_q_Ëq_ÿÿr_ÿÿIr_ÿÿyr_ÿÿ"r_ÿÿõr_ÿÿ4s_ÿÿqs_ÿÿµs_ÿÿós_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ós_7t_ÿÿtt_ÿÿ¶t_ÿÿút_ÿÿ<u_ÿÿ}
u_ÿÿ¿u_ÿÿÿu_ÿÿ<v_ÿÿ~v_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_~v_Áv_ÿÿÑv_ÿÿ_w_ÿÿOw_ÿÿ?
w_ÿÿÅw_ÿÿÓw_ÿÿ_x_ÿÿVx_ÿÿx_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_x_×x_ÿÿ_y_ÿÿPy_ÿÿ?
y_ÿÿÌy_ÿÿz_ÿÿ_z_ÿÿSz_ÿÿz_ÿÿÖz_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Öz_îz_ÿÿ,{_ÿÿn{_ÿÿ(r)
{_ÿÿÅ{_ÿÿ|_ÿÿF|_ÿÿ|_ÿÿÌ|_ÿÿ}_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
}_N}_ÿÿU}_ÿÿ-}_ÿÿØ}
_ÿÿ_~_ÿÿV~_ÿÿ'~_ÿÿÌ~_ÿÿ__ÿÿ:_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_:_w_ÿÿ¶_ÿÿú_ÿÿ8?_ÿÿy?
_ÿÿº?_ÿÿö?_ÿÿ7?_ÿÿt?_ÿÿ"?_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_"?_Ð?
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Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Á__"_ÿÿG"_ÿÿa"_ÿÿ "_ÿÿØ"_ÿÿ_…_ÿÿ\…_ÿÿ?…_ÿÿÙ…
_ÿÿ__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<__!_ÿÿd_ÿÿ§_ÿÿé_ÿÿ
$_ÿÿh_ÿÿ"_ÿÿi_ÿÿ_ÿÿE_ÿÿ_____

%?_ÿÿZ?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿØ?_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿ_____<_?_W?_ÿÿ”?
_ÿÿÓ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿK?_ÿÿh?_ÿÿ¤?_ÿÿè?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿJ?
_ÿÿ_____<_J?_?_ÿÿÐ?
_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿN?_ÿÿ’?_ÿÿ·?_ÿÿø?
_ÿÿ8′_ÿÿq’_ÿÿ²’_ÿÿ_____<_²’_ó’
_ÿÿN-_ÿÿ_____<_N-_U-
_ÿÿ’-_ÿÿ¢-_ÿÿá-_ÿÿ-_ÿÿ–_ÿÿG-_ÿÿX-_ÿÿ”-_ÿÿ¦-
_ÿÿ_____<_¦-_·-_ÿÿö-
_ÿÿ9_ÿÿJ_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ¹_ÿÿÊ_ÿÿ(tm)_ÿÿN(tm)_ÿÿe(tm)_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿt?_ÿÿ_____?Lð_<_t?_¶?
_ÿÿ×?_ÿÿè?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ]?_ÿÿ ?_ÿÿâ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ[?_ÿÿ_?
Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_<_[?_??
_ÿÿß?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿV?_ÿÿz?_ÿÿ¶?_ÿÿö?_ÿÿ4 _ÿÿv _ÿÿ· _ÿÿ_?Lð_?
Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_<_· _ú
_ÿÿ8¡_ÿÿv¡_ÿÿ¸¡_ÿÿá¡_ÿÿ!¢_ÿÿb¢_ÿÿ¥¢_ÿÿç¢_ÿÿ’£_ÿÿ_?Lð_?
Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_<_’£_c£_ÿÿ
£_ÿÿÂ£_ÿÿ_¤_ÿÿE¤_ÿÿ{¤_ÿÿ”¤_ÿÿü¤_ÿÿ=¥_ÿÿn¥_ÿÿ_?Lð_?
Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_<_n¥_ª¥_ÿÿí
¥_ÿÿ-¦_ÿÿh¦_ÿÿ¥¦_ÿÿé¦_ÿÿñ¦_ÿÿ-§_ÿÿp§_ÿÿ±§_ÿÿ_?Lð_?
Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_<_
±§_ë§_ÿÿ,¨_ÿÿl¨_ÿÿ¨_ÿÿò¨_ÿÿ1(c)_ÿÿM(c)_ÿÿ(c)_ÿÿÈ(c)_ÿÿ
ª_ÿÿ_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_?Lð_____<_
ª_Gª_ÿÿª_ÿÿÂª_ÿÿËª_ÿÿ”_ÿÿL”_ÿÿ?”_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ§”_ÿÿÔ”_ÿÿ_____
°_ÿÿ_____<_°_@°_ÿÿ|
°_ÿÿ1/2°_ÿÿÒ°_ÿÿø°_ÿÿù°_ÿÿ_±_x_±_ÿÿ ±_ÿÿ
±_ÿÿ_____<_
±_±_ÿÿ_±_ÿÿK±_ÿÿ…±_ÿÿÈ
±_ÿÿ²_ÿÿH²_ÿÿ²_ÿÿÆ²_ÿÿ_³_ÿÿ_____
³_ÿÿ¹³_ÿÿó³_ÿÿ4´_ÿÿq´_ÿÿ´_ÿÿ3/4
´_ÿÿ_µ_ÿÿ_____<_µ__µ_ÿÿTµ_ÿ
¤·_ÿÿÝ·_ÿÿ!
¸_ÿÿd¸_ÿÿ¡¸_ÿÿÀ¸_ÿÿü¸_ÿÿ¹_ÿÿ*¹_ÿÿ_____
¹_ÿÿß¹_ÿÿ_º_ÿÿ=º_ÿÿ~º_ÿÿ1/4º_ÿÿÞº_ÿÿ_”_ÿÿ4″_ÿÿ_____
±1/4_ÿÿî1/4_ÿÿ_1/2_ÿÿ_____<_
1/2_ÿÿÝ1/2_ÿÿ3/4_ÿÿ]3/4_ÿÿo3/4_ÿÿ
°3/4_ÿÿÔ3/4_ÿÿ_¿_ÿÿQ¿_ÿÿ_____
À_ÿÿÑÀ_ÿÿÞÀ_ÿÿ
+Á_ÿÿ7Á_ÿÿ]Á_ÿÿ_____<_]Á_?
Á_ÿÿ§Á_ÿÿâÁ_ÿÿ!
Â_ÿÿfÂ_ÿÿ(c)Â_ÿÿíÂ_ÿÿöÂ_ÿÿ9Ã_ÿÿhÃ_ÿÿ_____
Ã_ÿÿÍÃ_ÿÿ_Ä_ÿÿÄ_ÿÿ’Ä_ÿÿXÄ_ÿÿ?
Ä_ÿÿÌÄ_ÿÿ÷Ä_ÿÿ_Å_ÿÿ_____<_
\Å_ÿÿ?Å_ÿÿÂÅ_ÿÿ_Æ_ÿÿCÆ_ÿÿ”Æ_ÿÿ?

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_`_ÿÿ¡_ÿÿâ_ÿÿó_ÿÿô_ÿÿ__x__ÿÿ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ__ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿG_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÄ_ÿÿ___ÿÿA__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿÀ__ÿÿÿ__ÿÿA__ÿÿ_____<_A_
__ÿÿe_ÿÿ(c)__ÿÿ_____<_(c)__à__
__ÿÿb__ÿÿ¨__ÿÿé__ÿÿ&__ÿÿf__ÿÿu__ÿÿµ__ÿÿ÷__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿÀ__ÿÿÇ__ÿÿ___ÿÿA__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿ_____<_?__?
__ÿÿÞ__ÿÿ-
__ÿÿc__ÿÿ¦__ÿÿå__ÿÿ&__ÿÿh__ÿÿ¨__ÿÿë__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿË__ÿÿ__ÿÿJ__ÿÿ?__ÿÿÏ__ÿÿ_-_ÿÿ(-
_ÿÿ_____<_(-_k-_ÿÿ”-
_ÿÿÍ-_ÿÿ_ÿÿM_ÿÿ_ÿÿ¦_ÿÿç_ÿÿ_ _ÿÿ:
_ÿÿ_____<_: _| _ÿÿ[1]
_ÿÿù _ÿÿ>!_ÿÿ}!_ÿÿ£!_ÿÿÙ!
_ÿÿ_”_ÿÿV”_ÿÿ”_ÿÿ_____<_”_Ð
#_ÿÿÜ#_ÿÿ_$_ÿÿH$_ÿÿ$_ÿÿ?
$_ÿÿ_____<_?$_Ý$_ÿÿ_
%_ÿÿY%_ÿÿ%_ÿÿÓ%_ÿÿê
%_ÿÿ*&_ÿÿm&_ÿÿ”&_ÿÿì&_ÿÿ_____
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Å’_Ø’_ÿÿ_(_ÿÿQ(_ÿÿ?
(_ÿÿÊ(_ÿÿ_)_ÿÿ_)_ÿÿU)_ÿÿ?)_ÿÿÎ)_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Î)_í)_ÿÿ)*_ÿÿn*_ÿÿ¯*_ÿÿÜ*_ÿÿ-+_ÿÿ^+_ÿÿ?+_ÿÿã
+_ÿÿ ,_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ ,_6,_ÿÿx,_ÿÿº,_ÿÿø,_ÿÿ9-_ÿÿx-_ÿÿ¶-_ÿÿí-
_ÿÿ)._ÿÿj._ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð_<_j._”._ÿÿð._ÿÿ/_ÿÿH/_ÿÿT/_ÿÿ/_ÿÿ¤/_ÿÿå/
_ÿÿ)0_ÿÿF0_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð_<_F0_}
0_ÿÿ0_ÿÿÉ0_ÿÿú0_ÿÿ;1_ÿÿz1_ÿÿ1_ÿÿÄ1_ÿÿ_2_ÿÿ2_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
2_N2_ÿÿv2_ÿÿµ2_ÿÿõ2_ÿÿ:3_ÿÿv3_ÿÿ¸3_ÿÿö3_ÿÿ54_ÿÿq4_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?
Lð_____<_q4_”4_ÿÿÏ4_ÿÿ_5_ÿÿT5_ÿÿ”5_
%7_ÿÿe7_ÿÿ?
7_ÿÿÞ7_ÿÿ_8_ÿÿT8_ÿÿ”8_ÿÿ[3]8_ÿÿÌ8_ÿÿ_____
9_ÿÿÈ9_ÿÿ_:_ÿÿA:_ÿÿ:_ÿÿÆ:_ÿÿ
;_ÿÿ_____<_
;_I;_ÿÿ?;_ÿÿÌ;_ÿÿÔ;_ÿÿ_<_ÿÿQ<_ÿÿ”<_ÿÿÓ<_ÿÿ_=_ÿÿO=_ÿÿ_____
>_ÿÿ{>_ÿÿ¿>_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ[?
_ÿÿ_____?Lð_<_[?_?_ÿÿÙ?
_ÿÿó?_ÿÿ(@_ÿÿg@_ÿÿ(c)@_ÿÿØ@_ÿÿ_A_ÿÿSA_ÿÿ?A_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_?

A_ÐA_ÿÿ_B_ÿÿ=B_ÿÿB_ÿÿ1/4B_ÿÿãB_ÿÿùB_ÿÿ8C_ÿÿwC_ÿÿ(r)C_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_(r)C_ñC_ÿÿøC_ÿÿ7D_ÿÿOD_ÿÿD_ÿÿÆD_ÿÿE_ÿÿ
$E_ÿÿˆE_ÿÿzE_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_zE_”E_ÿÿùE_ÿÿ6F_ÿÿuF_ÿÿµF_ÿÿÛF_ÿÿ_G_ÿÿDG_ÿÿbG_ÿÿ
¢G_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_¢G_ÐG_ÿÿ_H_ÿÿ_H_ÿÿ&H_ÿÿ2H_ÿÿuH_ÿÿ?
H_ÿÿ1/4H_ÿÿõH_ÿÿ5I_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_5I_rI_ÿÿ|I_ÿÿ¿I_ÿÿÿI_ÿÿ=J_ÿÿEJ_ÿÿ|
J_ÿÿ?J_ÿÿÐJ_ÿÿôJ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_ôJ_
K_ÿÿˆK_ÿÿhK_ÿÿ¦K_ÿÿ(r)K_ÿÿîK_ÿÿ_L_ÿÿPL_ÿÿhL_ÿÿ¢L_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
¢L_ÀL_ÿÿ_M_ÿÿ<M_ÿÿ|
M_ÿÿºM_ÿÿûM_ÿÿ9N_ÿÿwN_ÿÿ·N_ÿÿóN_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_óN_ÿN_ÿÿ>O_ÿÿ?
O_ÿÿÀO_ÿÿ_P_ÿÿP_ÿÿHP_ÿÿP_ÿÿÇP_ÿÿ_Q_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Q_JQ_ÿÿfQ_ÿÿ
¥Q_ÿÿäQ_ÿÿR_ÿÿbR_ÿÿ¡R_ÿÿáR_ÿÿ-S_ÿÿ5S_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_5S_rS_ÿÿ³S_ÿÿ÷S_ÿÿ7T_ÿÿwT_ÿÿ3/4T_ÿÿûT_ÿÿ;U_ÿÿyU_ÿÿµU_
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_µU_öU_ÿÿ4V_ÿÿwV_ÿÿºV_ÿÿýV_ÿÿ=W_ÿÿ_W_ÿÿ?
W_ÿÿÝW_ÿÿ!X_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_!X_dX_ÿÿ?X_ÿÿÁX_ÿÿ_Y_ÿÿFY_ÿÿY_ÿÿ
£Y_ÿÿßY_ÿÿ-Z_ÿÿZZ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_ZZ_(tm)Z_ÿÿÜZ_ÿÿ_[_ÿÿ][_ÿÿ?[_ÿÿ
¤[_ÿÿâ[_ÿÿ!_ÿÿc_ÿÿ¤_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_¤_é
_ÿÿ']_ÿÿF]_ÿÿ]_ÿÿ3/4]_ÿÿý]_ÿÿ=ˆ_ÿÿsˆ_ÿÿ²ˆ_ÿÿðˆ_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ðˆ___ÿÿN__ÿÿ__ÿÿÎ__ÿÿð__ÿÿ.`_ÿÿj`_ÿÿˆ_ÿÿã`_ÿÿ-
a_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_-a_\a_ÿÿja_ÿÿ§a_ÿÿãa_ÿÿ!b_ÿÿ]b_ÿÿ?
b_ÿÿÞb_ÿÿ”c_ÿÿ@c_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_@c_?
c_ÿÿÁc_ÿÿéc_ÿÿ_d_ÿÿ>d_ÿÿd_ÿÿÃd_ÿÿÿd_ÿÿ@e_ÿÿwe_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_we_xe_ÿÿ”e_x_e_ÿÿe_ÿÿe_ÿÿ?
e_ÿÿ?e_ÿÿËe_ÿÿ_f_ÿÿPf_ÿÿ_____?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Pf_?f_ÿÿÏf_ÿÿg_ÿÿGg_ÿÿg_ÿÿ
¤g_ÿÿàg_ÿÿ!h_ÿÿbh_ÿÿ¢h_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?

Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_
¢h_äh_ÿÿ#i_ÿÿei_ÿÿ¨i_ÿÿêi_ÿÿ_j_ÿÿ?j_ÿÿj_ÿÿ1/4j_ÿÿüj_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_üj_7k_ÿÿsk_ÿÿ²k_ÿÿÖk_ÿÿôk_ÿÿ.l_ÿÿll_ÿÿ¬l_ÿÿ³l_ÿÿñl_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ñl_.m_ÿÿom_ÿÿ°m_ÿÿêm_ÿÿ
$n_ÿÿˆn_ÿÿ”n_ÿÿÒn_ÿÿ_o_ÿÿLo_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_Lo_?
o_ÿÿÊo_ÿÿp_ÿÿIp_ÿÿp_ÿÿÃp_ÿÿ_q_ÿÿq_ÿÿJq_ÿÿq_ÿÿ_?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_q_Îq_ÿÿ_r_ÿÿCr_ÿÿ?
r_ÿÿÁr_ÿÿûr_ÿÿ:s_ÿÿJs_ÿÿs_ÿÿÍs_ÿÿ_____
u_ÿÿ¿u_ÿÿ_v_ÿÿ>v_ÿÿ_____<_>
¥x_ÿÿÐx_ÿÿ_y_ÿÿRy_ÿÿ”y_ÿÿÕy_ÿÿ_z_ÿÿYz_ÿÿ”z_ÿÿ_____
{_ÿÿÝ{_ÿÿ_|_ÿÿ*|_ÿÿi|_ÿÿ”|_ÿÿÈ|
_ÿÿ_____<_È|__}_ÿÿ?}
_ÿÿK}_ÿÿ}_ÿÿÂ}_ÿÿÞ}_ÿÿ~_ÿÿJ~_ÿÿP~_ÿÿ?
~_ÿÿ_____<_?
~_(c)~_ÿÿâ~_ÿÿï~_ÿÿ!_ÿÿ;_ÿÿ__ÿÿ_ÿÿ(c)_ÿÿé_ÿÿ$?
_ÿÿ_____<_$?_@?_ÿÿ?
_ÿÿ1/2?_ÿÿã?_ÿÿ%?_ÿÿf?_ÿÿ ?_ÿÿâ?
_ÿÿ-_ÿÿ`_ÿÿ_____<_`_¡_ÿÿÜ_ÿÿ
_ÿÿi…_ÿÿ(c)…_ÿÿì…
_ÿÿ*_ÿÿL_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÉ_ÿÿ__ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿG_ÿÿ…_ÿÿÆ_ÿÿÿ_ÿÿ>_ÿÿ~_ÿÿ_____
±_ÿÿ_____<_
±_ô_ÿÿ8?_ÿÿr?_ÿÿ”?_ÿÿÆ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ,?_ÿÿl?_ÿÿ¯?_ÿÿ×?
_ÿÿ_____<_×?__?_ÿÿV?
_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÔ?_ÿÿ_?_ÿÿ#?_ÿÿd?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿâ?_ÿÿ!?
_ÿÿ_____<_!?_\?
_ÿÿ(tm)?_ÿÿÜ?
_ÿÿ_’_ÿÿV’_ÿÿ…’_ÿÿ¿’_ÿÿÜ’_ÿÿ_’_ÿÿ[’_ÿÿ_____
¤”_ÿÿâ”_ÿÿ
“_ÿÿd”_ÿÿ¡”_ÿÿ_____<_¡”_â”_ÿÿ
%_ÿÿd_ÿÿ¬_ÿÿì_ÿÿ+-_ÿÿp-_ÿÿ±-_ÿÿî-_ÿÿ_-
_ÿÿ_____<_-_T-_ÿÿ”-
_ÿÿÔ-_ÿÿß-_ÿÿ__ÿÿ[_ÿÿ?_ÿÿÝ_ÿÿ
$(tm)_ÿÿa(tm)_ÿÿ_____<_a(tm)_?
(tm)_ÿÿ¯(tm)_ÿÿë(tm)_ÿÿ__ÿÿQ_ÿÿ’_ÿÿÏ_ÿÿò_ÿÿ4_ÿÿq_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿO?_ÿÿ??_ÿÿÑ?_ÿÿ?_ÿÿM?_ÿÿ|?_ÿÿ¿?
_ÿÿ_____<_¿?_ü?_ÿÿ_?
_ÿÿ?_ÿÿˆ?_ÿÿ£?_ÿÿç?_ÿÿ*?_ÿÿl?_ÿÿ(c)?_ÿÿå?
_ÿÿ_____<_å?_% _ÿÿd
_ÿÿ? _ÿÿ(c) _ÿÿâ _ÿÿ_¡_ÿÿ_¡_ÿÿW¡_ÿÿ-¡_ÿÿ?

¡_ÿÿ_____<_?¡_Ñ¡_ÿÿ
¢_ÿÿJ¢_ÿÿ¢_ÿÿÉ¢_ÿÿ £_ÿÿJ£_ÿÿ£_ÿÿË£_ÿÿ
¤_ÿÿ_____<_ ¤_D¤_ÿÿ
¤_ÿÿ'¤_ÿÿÐ¤_ÿÿ¥_ÿÿL¥_ÿÿ?¥_ÿÿÌ
¥_ÿÿ¦_ÿÿM¦_ÿÿ_____<_M¦_n¦_ÿ
¨_ÿÿ`¨_ÿÿ_____<_`¨_?
¨_ÿÿÕ¨_ÿÿ_(c)_ÿÿ_(c)_ÿÿM(c)_ÿÿN(c)_ÿÿZ(c)_x
\(c)_ÿÿ^(c)_ÿÿ`(c)_ÿÿ_____<_`(c)_
(c)_ÿÿâ(c)_ÿÿ_ª_ÿÿ^ª_ÿÿª_ÿÿÞª_ÿÿ
"_ÿÿQ"_ÿÿ_____<_Q"_?"_ÿÿÎ"_
(r)_ÿÿì(r)_ÿÿ.¯_ÿÿr¯_ÿÿµ¯_ÿÿó¯_ÿÿ_
°_ÿÿ_____<_°_W°_ÿÿ-
°_ÿÿÂ°_ÿÿ_±_ÿÿA±_ÿÿ}±_ÿÿ"±_ÿÿê
±_ÿÿ(²_ÿÿL²_ÿÿ_____<_L²_²_ÿ
³_ÿÿÄ³_ÿÿ_´_ÿÿ?´_ÿÿ´_ÿÿ1/2
´_ÿÿ_____<_1/2´_ý
´_ÿÿAµ_ÿÿ}µ_ÿÿ¿µ_ÿÿ_¶_ÿÿ?
¶_ÿÿU¶_ÿÿ"¶_ÿÿÄ¶_ÿÿ·_ÿÿ_____?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_·_B·_ÿÿk·_ÿÿ(r)·_ÿÿð·_ÿÿ/
¸_ÿÿm¸_ÿÿ"¸_ÿÿç¸_ÿÿ*¹_ÿÿ5¹_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_5¹_t¹_ÿÿ¶¹_ÿÿè¹_ÿÿ#º_ÿÿeº_ÿÿ¦º_ÿÿçº_ÿÿîº_ÿÿ/"_ÿÿj"_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_j"_?"_ÿÿÚ"_ÿÿ_1/4_ÿÿZ1/4_ÿÿ?1/4_ÿÿ¹1/4_ÿÿ÷1/4_ÿÿ
+1/2_ÿÿm1/2_ÿÿ1/2_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_1/2_Ã1/2_ÿÿý1/2_ÿÿ83/4_ÿÿu3/4_ÿÿ¯3/4_ÿÿð3/4_ÿÿ÷3/4_ÿÿ1¿_ÿ
¤¿_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_
¤¿_å¿_ÿÿ&À_ÿÿjÀ_ÿÿªÀ_ÿÿèÀ_ÿÿõÀ_ÿÿ5Á_ÿÿuÁ_ÿÿ"Á_ÿÿ¹Á_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_¹Á_øÁ_ÿÿ7Â_ÿÿtÂ_ÿÿÂ_ÿÿ"Â_ÿÿÎÂ_ÿÿ_Ã_ÿÿSÃ_ÿÿ'Ã_ÿÿ¶Ã_ÿÿ_
Lð__?
Lð_____<_¶Ã_óÃ_ÿÿÄ_ÿÿGÄ_ÿÿ|
Ä_ÿÿ"Ä_ÿÿúÄ_ÿÿ_Å_ÿÿXÅ_ÿÿÅ_ÿÿÚÅ_ÿÿ_____
Ç_ÿÿXÇ_ÿÿÇ_ÿÿÖÇ_ÿÿ_È_ÿÿSÈ_ÿÿ_____
¢È_ÿÿ1/2È_ÿÿ3/4È_ÿÿÊÈ_x_ÌÈ_ÿÿÎÈ_ÿÿÐÈ_ÿÿÒÈ_ÿÿÔÈ_ÿÿ_____
Ë_ÿÿÛË_ÿÿ_Ì_ÿÿ@Ì_ÿÿÌ_ÿÿÃÌ_ÿÿþÌ_ÿÿ>Í_ÿÿ_____
Ð_ÿÿØÐ_ÿÿ_Ñ_ÿÿWÑ_ÿÿ-
Ñ_ÿÿ_____<_-
Ñ_×Ñ_ÿÿ_Ò_ÿÿVÒ_ÿÿ'Ò_ÿÿ"ÓÒ_ÿÿüÒ_ÿÿ:Ó_ÿÿUÓ_ÿÿiÓ_ÿÿ¨Ó_ÿÿ____
$Ô_ÿÿdÔ_ÿÿÔ_ÿÿÜÔ_ÿÿ_Õ_ÿÿXÕ_ÿÿÕ_ÿÿÕÕ_ÿÿ_Ö_ÿÿ_____?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Ö_1Ö_ÿÿjÖ_ÿÿªÖ_ÿÿÂÖ_ÿÿíÖ_ÿÿ%×_ÿÿ_×_ÿÿ

×_ÿÿß×_ÿÿØ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Ø_`Ø_ÿÿØ_ÿÿÚØ_ÿÿÙ_ÿÿZÙ_ÿÿ(tm)Ù_ÿÿÝÙ_ÿÿ_Ú_ÿÿ]Ú_ÿÿ?
Ú_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_?Ú_ÛÚ_ÿÿ_Û_ÿÿZÛ_ÿÿ?
Û_ÿÿÝÛ_ÿÿÜ_ÿÿOÜ_ÿÿbÜ_ÿÿ(tm)Ü_ÿÿÕÜ_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ÕÜ__Ý_ÿÿTÝ_ÿÿ'Ý_ÿÿÐÝ_ÿÿÞ_ÿÿIÞ_ÿÿiÞ_ÿÿ
¥Þ_ÿÿåÞ_ÿÿ(ß_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_(ß_cß_ÿÿ…ß_ÿÿ(r)ß_ÿÿîß_ÿÿ-
à_ÿÿjà_ÿÿ§à_ÿÿÏà_ÿÿá_ÿÿJá_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Já_ná_ÿÿ¨á_ÿÿçá_ÿÿ*â_ÿÿeâ_ÿÿ¨â_ÿÿäâ_ÿÿ
%ã_ÿÿbã_ÿÿ¦ã_ÿÿ_?
Lð_____<_¦ã_êã_ÿÿ_ä_ÿÿQä_ÿÿ?
ä_ÿÿÔä_ÿÿéä_ÿÿå_ÿÿ_å_ÿÿ6å_ÿÿpå_ÿÿ_____
æ_ÿÿqæ_ÿÿ¬æ_ÿÿåæ_ÿÿ'ç_ÿÿfç_ÿÿ
¥ç_ÿÿåç_ÿÿ_____<_åç_è_ÿÿ7è_ÿ
ê_ÿÿê_ÿÿÝê_ÿÿ ë_ÿÿaë_ÿÿ
¢ë_ÿÿÃë_ÿÿ_____<_Ãë__ì_ÿÿAì_
ì_ÿÿËì_ÿÿí_ÿÿKí_ÿÿí_ÿÿ?
í_ÿÿ_____<_?
í_¬í_ÿÿ¸í_ÿÿÞí_ÿÿ_î_ÿÿ-
î_ÿÿ*î_ÿÿbî_ÿÿî_ÿÿÃî_ÿÿ_ï_ÿÿ_____
ñ_$ñ_ÿÿXñ_ÿÿñ_ÿÿÎñ_ÿÿÚñ_ÿÿúñ_ÿÿò_ÿÿ0ò_ÿÿ<ò_ÿÿ|
ò_ÿÿ_____<_|
ò_ò_ÿÿ¡ò_ÿÿÝò_ÿÿäò_ÿÿðò_ÿÿ2ó_ÿÿQó_ÿÿeó_ÿÿó_ÿÿÈó_ÿÿ_____
ô_ÿÿFô_ÿÿô_ÿÿÀô_ÿÿÿô_ÿÿ=õ_ÿÿ|õ_ÿÿ?
õ_ÿÿ§õ_ÿÿ³õ_ÿÿ_____<_³õ_îõ_ÿ
ö_ÿÿÎö_ÿÿóö_ÿÿ_÷_ÿÿQ÷_ÿÿ_____
ø_ÿÿ4ø_ÿÿvø_ÿÿ'ø_ÿÿ²ø_ÿÿñø_ÿÿ
%ù_ÿÿ_____<_
%ù_fù_ÿÿ
¢ù_ÿÿçù_ÿÿú_ÿÿHú_ÿÿhú_ÿÿ"ú_ÿÿÒú_ÿÿ_û_ÿÿ_û_ÿÿ_____
û_ÿÿÌû_ÿÿêû_ÿÿ*ü_ÿÿlü_ÿÿ(r)ü_ÿÿíü_ÿÿ1ý_ÿÿqý_ÿÿ_____
°ÿ_ÿÿ_____<_
°ÿ_Áÿ_ÿÿÂÿ_ÿÿÎÿ_x_Ðÿ_ÿÿÒÿ_ÿÿÔÿ_ÿÿÖÿ_ÿÿØÿ_ÿÿÿÿ_ÿÿ>__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿ__ÿÿÆ__ÿÿÍ__ÿÿ__ÿÿS__ÿÿ_____
__ÿÿÖ__ÿÿ___ÿÿV__ÿÿ"__ÿÿÇ__ÿÿ___ÿÿC_ÿÿ…
__ÿÿÅ__ÿÿ_____<_Å_____ÿÿC__ÿÿ
__ÿÿ¿__ÿÿÿ__ÿÿ9_ÿÿ_____<_9_{
¢__ÿÿã__ÿÿö__ÿÿ7 _ÿÿw
_ÿÿ_____<_w _1/2 _ÿÿø
_ÿÿ8_ÿÿE_ÿÿ"_ÿÿÃ_ÿÿ__ÿÿG_ÿÿ_ÿÿÊ_ÿÿ_____

_ÿÿN_ÿÿl_ÿÿ£_ÿÿé_ÿÿ*_ÿÿj_ÿÿ¨_ÿÿè_ÿÿ&_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_&_f_ÿÿ…
_ÿÿÃ_ÿÿ___ÿÿC__ÿÿ?__ÿÿµ__ÿÿñ__ÿÿ)__ÿÿH__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_H__o__ÿÿ'__ÿÿÑ__ÿÿ___ÿÿT__ÿÿ"__ÿÿÔ__ÿÿ___ÿÿ/
__ÿÿa__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_a____ÿÿ¢__ÿÿº__ÿÿÝ__ÿÿù__ÿÿ4__ÿÿw__ÿÿ·__ÿÿø__ÿÿ
%__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_%__b__ÿÿ?__ÿÿÛ__ÿÿ__ÿÿC__ÿÿ__ÿÿ?__ÿÿÖ__ÿÿô__ÿÿ
%__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_%__h__ÿÿ¨__ÿÿÈ__ÿÿ___ÿÿ
__ÿÿ[__ÿÿ__ÿÿÙ__ÿÿß__ÿÿà__ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_à__ì__x_î__ÿÿð__ÿÿò__ÿÿô__ÿÿ2__ÿÿh__ÿÿ__ÿÿí__ÿÿ0__ÿÿ
±__ÿÿõ__ÿÿ___ÿÿV__ÿÿ"__ÿÿ×__ÿÿ___ÿÿL__ÿÿ?
__ÿÿ_____<_?
__Ï__ÿÿ___ÿÿR__ÿÿ'__ÿÿÃ__ÿÿñ__ÿÿ0__ÿÿ=__ÿÿ__ÿÿÂ__ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿx-_ÿÿ·-_ÿÿö-_ÿÿÿ-_ÿÿ__ÿÿ[_ÿÿ…
_ÿÿÁ_ÿÿ_____<_Á_ù_ÿÿ-
_ÿÿ_ _ÿÿ¢ _ÿÿä _ÿÿ"!_ÿÿd!_ÿÿ£!_ÿÿê!
_ÿÿ("_ÿÿ_____<_("_ï"_ÿÿª"_ÿÿë
$_ÿÿp$_ÿÿ¬
$_ÿÿ_____<_¬$_í$_ÿÿ,
%_ÿÿi%_ÿÿ¦%_ÿÿâ%_ÿÿ$&_ÿÿ_&_ÿÿ
&_ÿÿ³&_ÿÿó&_ÿÿ_____<_ó&_4′_
(_ÿÿq(_ÿÿ(r)
(_ÿÿò(_ÿÿ4)_ÿÿu)_ÿÿ_____<_u)_
+_ÿÿm+_ÿÿ+_ÿÿî
+_ÿÿ_____<_î
+_-,_ÿÿi,_ÿÿ",_ÿÿë,_ÿÿ–_ÿÿf-_ÿÿ¤-_ÿÿ±-_ÿÿò-
_ÿÿ2._ÿÿ_____<_2._o._ÿÿ
°._ÿÿó._ÿÿ7/_ÿÿ{/_ÿÿ1/4/_ÿÿü/_ÿÿ(0_ÿÿe0_ÿÿ
¢0_ÿÿ_____<_¢0_ã0_ÿÿ
$1_ÿÿe1_ÿÿ¢1_ÿÿå1_ÿÿ$2_ÿÿU2_ÿÿ?
2_ÿÿÆ2_ÿÿ_3_ÿÿ_____<_3_?
3_ÿÿy3_ÿÿ¹3_ÿÿÞ3_ÿÿ_4_ÿÿ[4_ÿÿ-4_ÿÿÏ4_ÿÿ5_ÿÿK5_ÿÿ_____
9_ÿÿ3/49_ÿÿÿ9_ÿÿ_____<_ÿ9_<
¥;_ÿÿå;_ÿÿ&<_ÿÿl<_ÿÿ_____<
_ÿÿu?_ÿÿ´?_ÿÿñ?_ÿÿ*@_ÿÿj@_ÿÿ¬@_ÿÿî@_ÿÿ
A_ÿÿ_A_ÿÿ_____<_A_A_ÿÿÝA_
C_x(tm)C_ÿÿC_ÿÿ?C_ÿÿÝC_ÿÿ-
D_ÿÿ9D_ÿÿwD_ÿÿ_____<_wD_¶
E_ÿÿäE_ÿÿF_ÿÿaF_ÿÿ¦F_ÿÿÄF_ÿÿ_____
G_ÿÿ¸G_ÿÿøG_ÿÿ8H_ÿÿ|

H_ÿÿH_ÿÿÊH_ÿÿI_ÿÿ_____<_
I_LI_ÿÿ?I_ÿÿÍI_ÿÿJ_ÿÿDJ_ÿÿJ_ÿÿÀJ_ÿÿüJ_ÿÿ?K_ÿÿ?
K_ÿÿ_____<_?
K_K_ÿÿ×K_ÿÿ_L_ÿÿ
\L_ÿÿL_ÿÿÝL_ÿÿM_ÿÿbM_ÿÿM_ÿÿM_ÿÿ_____
M_ÿÿ(tm)M_ÿÿM_ÿÿÞM_ÿÿ_N_ÿÿ]N_ÿÿN_ÿÿÝN_ÿÿ_O_ÿÿ_____
P_ÿÿ_P_ÿÿ|P_ÿÿ?
P_ÿÿÊP_ÿÿ_____<_ÊP_ÞP_ÿÿ_Q_
S_ÿÿÞS_ÿÿT_ÿÿˆT_ÿÿT_ÿÿÒT_ÿÿ_U_ÿÿQU_ÿÿ_____
U_ÿÿ?
U_ÿÿ§U_ÿÿÝU_ÿÿðU_ÿÿ*V_ÿÿgV_ÿÿ§V_ÿÿèV_ÿÿñV_ÿÿ_____
+X_ÿÿjX_ÿÿ¨X_ÿÿÅX_ÿÿýX_ÿÿ_____
Y_ÿÿÇY_ÿÿ_Z_ÿÿCZ_ÿÿZ_ÿÿ³Z_ÿÿÚZ_ÿÿ_[_ÿÿ_____
[_ÿÿË[_ÿÿ_ÿÿ__ÿÿ]_ÿÿ”_ÿÿÆ_ÿÿõ
_ÿÿ4]_ÿÿ_____<_4]_w]_ÿÿ·]_ÿ
^_ÿÿ§^_ÿÿ¿^_ÿÿ_____<_¿^_ä^_ÿÿ
__ÿÿ{__ÿÿ
¤__ÿÿ¶__ÿÿï__ÿÿ_`_ÿÿ_`_ÿÿ[`_ÿÿ_____
¢`_ÿÿ(r)`_x_°`_ÿÿ²`_ÿÿ^_ÿÿ¶`_ÿÿû`_ÿÿ<a_ÿÿ_____?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð_<_<a_?
a_ÿÿÃa_ÿÿ_b_ÿÿIb_ÿÿb_ÿÿµb_ÿÿöb_ÿÿ4c_ÿÿqc_ÿÿµc_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_µc_òc_ÿÿ5d_ÿÿvd_ÿÿµd_ÿÿÛd_ÿÿ_e_ÿÿWe_ÿÿ…
e_ÿÿÁe_ÿÿÿe_ÿÿ_?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_ÿe_<f_ÿÿzf_ÿÿ1/2f_ÿÿ_g_ÿÿAg_ÿÿPg_ÿÿ’g_ÿÿÑg_ÿÿ_h_ÿÿXh_ÿÿ
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_Xh_h_ÿÿÚh_ÿÿ_i_ÿÿ[i_ÿÿi_ÿÿÅi_ÿÿÑi_ÿÿj_ÿÿOj_ÿÿ’j_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_<_’j_Ðj_ÿÿ_k_ÿÿQk_ÿÿk_ÿÿÆk_ÿÿl_ÿÿ3l_ÿÿ4l_ÿÿ@l_x_Bl_ÿÿ_?
Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?Lð__?
Lð_____<_Bl_Dl_ÿÿFl_ÿÿHl_ÿÿJl_ÿÿl_ÿÿÁl_ÿÿül_ÿÿ6m_ÿ
m_ÿÿ_____<_?
m_Ûm_ÿÿ_n_ÿÿ1n_ÿÿkn_ÿÿ(c)n_ÿÿ1/4n_ÿÿùn_ÿÿ:o_ÿÿyo_ÿÿ1/2o_ÿÿ___
±p_ÿÿðp_ÿÿ0q_ÿÿpq_ÿÿq_ÿÿÚq_ÿÿ_r_ÿÿ_____
+t_ÿÿkt_ÿÿ_____<_kt_”t_ÿÿèt_
%u_ÿÿdu_ÿÿ
¢u_ÿÿâu_ÿÿ&v_ÿÿhv_ÿÿªv_ÿÿÊv_ÿÿ_____
w_ÿÿ_____<_?
w_×w_ÿÿ_x_ÿÿ[x_ÿÿ?x_ÿÿÛx_ÿÿ_y_ÿÿ#y_ÿÿby_ÿÿ
£y_ÿÿäy_ÿÿ_____<_äy__z_ÿÿYz_
%{_ÿÿa{_ÿÿ¡{_ÿÿã{_ÿÿ |
_ÿÿ_____<_ |_E|_ÿÿ|
_ÿÿ3/4|_ÿÿý|_ÿÿ?}_ÿÿ?}_ÿÿÀ}_ÿÿ_~_ÿÿ?

~_ÿÿ~~_ÿÿ_____<_~~_·~_ÿÿ
_ÿÿv?_ÿÿ²?_ÿÿí?
_ÿÿ_____<_í?_)?_ÿÿk?
_ÿÿ§?_ÿÿê?
_ÿÿ*_ÿÿo_ÿÿ_ÿÿì_ÿÿ__ÿÿM_ÿÿ_____
_ÿÿf…_ÿÿ_____<_f…_§…
_ÿÿ(r)…_ÿÿí…
_ÿÿ_ÿÿO_ÿÿV_ÿÿW_ÿÿ_____
.ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?ÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜ_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?ÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜ_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?ÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜ_Ò_`B .ÿÿ0_?6ð_@&___?

%_<__ÿÿ_&_B__ÿÿ_'_E__ÿÿ_(_<__ÿÿ_)_@__ÿÿ_*___ÿÿ_
+_D__ÿÿ_,___ÿÿ_-___ÿÿ_.___ÿÿ_/
_&__ÿÿ_0_>__ÿÿ_1___ÿÿ_2_>__ÿÿ_3_A__ÿÿ_4_A__ÿÿ_5___ÿÿ_6_?
__ÿÿ_7_A__ÿÿ_8___ÿÿ_9_B__ÿÿ_:___ÿÿ_;_3__ÿÿ_<_C__ÿÿ_=_=__ÿÿ_>
_B__ÿÿ_@_6__ÿÿ_A_?__ÿÿ_B_@__ÿÿ_C_?
__ÿÿ_D_<__ÿÿ_E_>__ÿÿ_F_9__ÿÿ_G___ÿÿ_H_=__ÿÿ_I_@__ÿÿ_J_@__ÿ
%__ÿÿ_L_?
__ÿÿ_M___ÿÿ_N_>__ÿÿ_O_C__ÿÿ_P___ÿÿ_Q_>__ÿÿ_R_B__ÿÿ_S_?
__ÿÿ_T___ÿÿ_U_;__ÿÿ_V_C__ÿÿ_W_A__ÿÿ_X___ÿÿ_Y__ÿÿ_Z___ÿÿ_[_
$__ÿÿ__?__ÿÿ_]_?__ÿÿ_^___ÿÿ_____ÿÿ_`_E__ÿÿ_a_?
__ÿÿ_b___ÿÿ_c_=__ÿÿ_d_:__ÿÿ_e___ÿÿ_f___ÿÿ_g_<__ÿÿ_h___ÿÿ_i_>
__ÿÿ_o_D__ÿÿ_p_;__ÿÿ_q_>__ÿÿ_r___ÿÿ_s_#__ÿÿ_t_(__ÿÿ_u_@__ÿÿ_v_
+__ÿÿ_{___ÿÿ_|_@__ÿÿ_}_D__ÿÿ_~___ÿÿ__(__ÿÿ_?_?__ÿÿ_?
___ÿÿ__C__ÿÿ__(__ÿÿ_”___ÿÿ…_@__ÿÿ__?
__ÿÿ__B__ÿÿ__@__ÿÿ__>__ÿÿ_____ÿÿ__B__ÿÿ_?_=__ÿÿ_?
___ÿÿ_?_@__ÿÿ_?_$__ÿÿ_?
_7__ÿÿ_'_>__ÿÿ_'___ÿÿ_”_A__ÿÿ_”___ÿÿ_____ÿÿ_-_F__ÿÿ_-_?
__ÿÿ__?__ÿÿ(tm)___ÿÿ_____ÿÿ_____ÿÿ_?___ÿÿ_?___ÿÿ_?
___ÿÿ_?__ÿÿ_
__ÜÜÜ